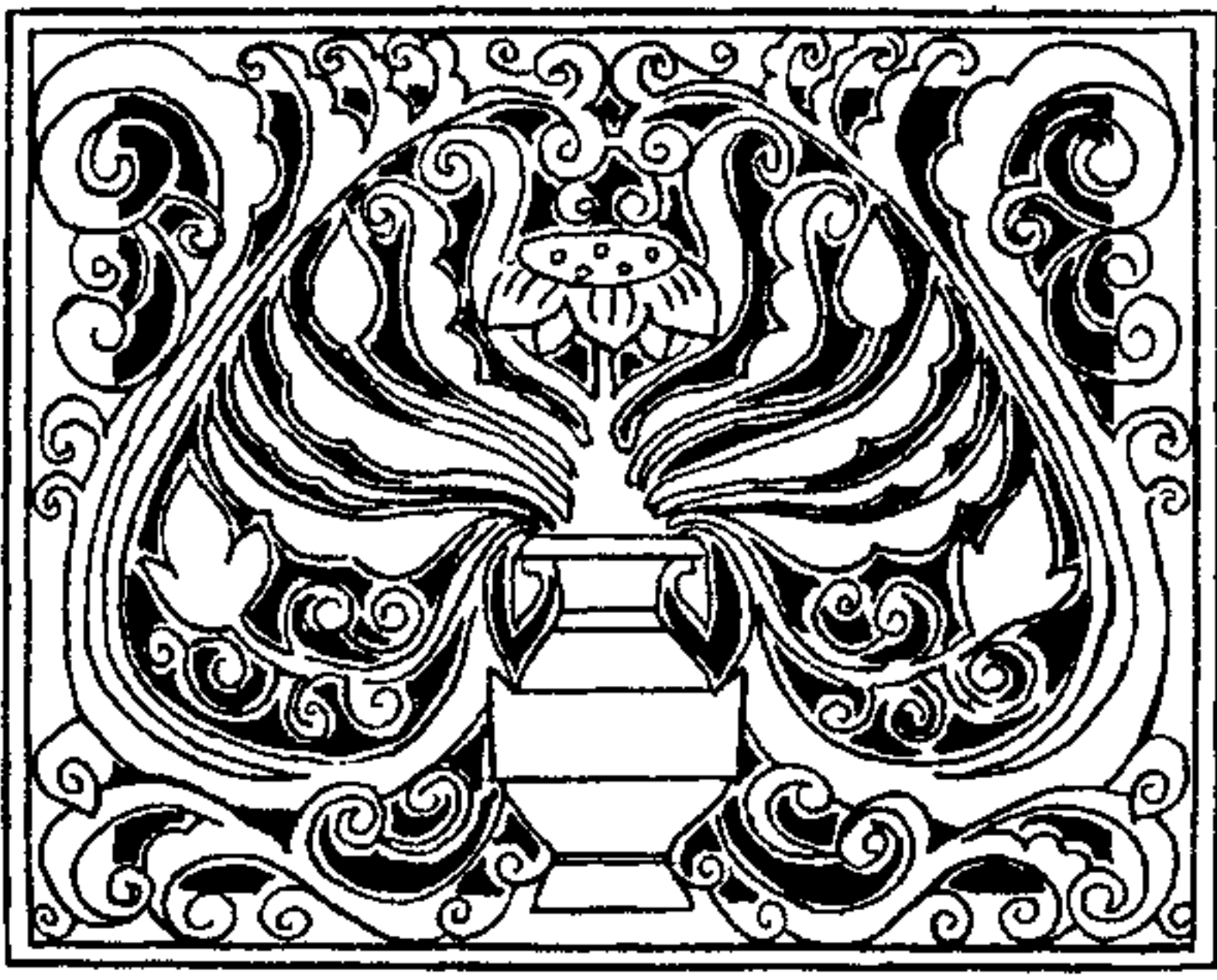




PRABUDDHA BHARATA

A Monthly Journal of the
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JUNE 1997

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उत्तिष्ठत
जाग्रत
प्राप्य
वरान्निबोधत



PRABUDDHA BHARATA

ARISE! AWAKE! AND STOP NOT TILL THE GOAL IS REACHED

Vol. 102

JUNE 1997

No. 6

Divine Wisdom

DETAILS OF THE PATH OF DEVOTION

(Sage Kapila to his Mother Devahūti)

निषेवितेनानिमित्तेन स्वधर्मेण महीयसा।
क्रियायोगेन शस्तेन नातिहिंस्त्रेण नित्यशः॥

The mind attains to such a state by adopting the following disciplines: The duties of life have to be performed with detachment and as an offering to the Divine. Ritualistic worship, promoting devotion and not involving infliction of pain on creatures, should be observed.

मद्भिष्यदर्शनस्पर्शपूजास्तुत्यभिवन्दनैः।
भूतेषु मद्भावनया सत्त्वेनासङ्गमेन च॥

My images installed in holy places should be worshipped, seen, touched and

glorified by hymns and praises capable of stimulating devotion. My presence in all beings should be recognized. The mind should be so disciplined as to have no attachment to worldly objects.

महतां बहुमानेन दीनानामनुकम्पया।
मैत्र्या चैवात्मतुल्येषु यमेन नियमेन च॥

Holy men should be honoured; men in distress should be shown sympathy and kindness; and equals should be treated with friendliness and courtesy. Control of the external senses and of the mind should be practised.

Srīmad-Bhāgavatam, 3.29.15-17

Ramakrishna Phenomenon

A study of the Ramakrishna Phenomenon is a study of Sri Ramakrishna, of his divine consort Sri Sarada Devi, and of Swami Vivekananda, the leader of his apostles. This is so because their lives are so inter-related that they need to be studied together. Both the East and the West were nearing the brink of disaster. The former neglected traditional spiritual values, failed to apply spiritual truths in practical life, and kept spiritual truths away from the masses. The latter owing to preoccupation with the pleasures of the sensate world went in for a scientific study of nature to gain an insight into the forces working in nature with a view to putting them to the benefit of mankind through technological advancement to make possible a comfortable life. The knowledge gained from the study of nature did additional havoc by shaking the fragile foundation of those religions which are based merely on unquestioning faith. What both the East and the West needed was a religion at once scientific in being verifiable and demonstrable and at the same time practical in daily life. In Vedanta we have such a religion. The unitary vision which Vedanta provides is the medicine for the world's disease. And it is to spread the message of Vedanta in a manner suitable to the present age that the Holy Trio descended on earth.

A study of the life of the Holy Trio enables one to see clearly that the unfurling of what is now called the Ramakrishna Movement went through a number of milestones—the various incidents in their lives which gave clear indications of the divine mission that the Movement would endeavour to fulfil in the future. While it is not

possible to deal with all events exhaustively, an attempt is made here to recapitulate as many events as possible to purify ourselves by what is called *līlā-cintan* (contemplation of the play of the divine) and also to understand the aim and objects of the Movement started in the wake of their advent.

During the first four-year period 1856–1859, Sri Ramakrishna, taking the only external help of his investiture with the sacred thread and the initiation he had received from Sri Kenaram Bhattacharyya, proceeded to realize God with extreme eagerness. This conferred on him the immediate knowledge of the Divine Mother as also endowed him with yogic powers. He also performed during this period sadhana according to the *Dāśya*, *Śānta* and *Sākhya Bhāvas*.

During the second four-year period 1860–1863, Sri Ramakrishna underwent all the disciplines prescribed in the sixty-four main Tantras under the instruction of Bhairavi Brahmani. Attaining divine powers he came to know by the grace of the Divine Mother that many persons would come to him in later days and get spiritual enlightenment.

During the third four-year period 1864–1867, Sri Ramakrishna practised sadhana according to the *Vāṭṣalya Bhāva* on initiation into the *mantra* of Sri Rama by Jatadhari, underwent sadhana according to *Madhura Bhāva* attired in woman's apparel looking upon himself as a female companion of the Divine Mother, and ascended to the *Nirvikalpa* plane of consciousness receiving the Vedic *Mahāvākya* from his revered Guru, Sri Totapuriji. He, on initiation into the Sufi faith by Govinda Ray, successively

attained the vision of an effluent, impressive personage with a long beard, the knowledge of the all-pervading Brahman with attributes, and finally, the knowledge of the attributeless Brahman.

Another important event in the life of Sri Ramakrishna is the performance of *Shodasi Puja* in the person of Sri Sarada, his divine consort, in the year 1872. At the end of the worship he forever offered at the lotus feet of the Deity his all—the results of his sadhana, his rosary, etc. along with himself and saluted Her. The event had manifold significance: (a) to awaken and make active the divine Essence in Sri Sarada, (b) to raise her in the estimation of the world by offering his own sincerest worship, (c) to prepare her for taking up the threads of his unfinished mission after his earthly existence, (d) to make her conscious of her divine stature, (e) to make her heir to the richest spiritual wealth, (f) to teach her to look upon all beings as the manifestation of the Divine Mother, (g) to make humanity look upon woman as the image of the Divine Mother, and (h) to test the strength and genuineness of his knowledge of Brahman.

A year after this in 1873, Sri Ramakrishna turned to Christianity. His mind was filled with a great faith in and reverence for Jesus and the path founded by him, and he was imbued with the eagerness of Christian padrees as revealed in their solemn prayers. He was blessed with the vision of Jesus Christ who merged into his own person.

Sri Ramakrishna held in esteem other religions also. He regarded Bhagavan Buddha as an incarnation of God and had love and respect for the Tirthankaras and the Sikh Gurus. Thus he practised spiritual disciplines according to all the major religions of the world and realized through personal experience that all religious sects are just so many roads to reach the same ultimate goal.

Swami Virajananda, describing Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual practices, has pertinently observed that this chapter of his

life is:

unique in the records of prophets and seers and God-men, as one which proved to demonstration the great truth that different faiths and religions are but so many paths to lead to the one Reality. He did not arrive at that conclusion by intellectual gymnastics or liberal thinking, but took by the hand one religion after another separately and in succession, became duly initiated into each of them and practised the formulas of each in its orthodox style, and finally reached the ultimate goal of each.... It was this realization of the highest truth through each and every path, though apparently opposed to one another as the poles, that made him look upon all religions as true, leading to the same goal.... To sound the trumpet note of peace among the warring sects, by his own living example was the grandest mission of Sri Ramakrishna's life. All love for every one and not a word of abuse, ever broke forth from his lips. Members of all sects and denominations used to throng around him and would go back, each taking him to be the ideal of his own sect.... He would not see whether one was Dvaitist or Advaitist, or Visishthadvaitist or even nihilist, whether one was a worshipper of Vishnu, or Rama, or Kali or Christ, but he would only judge by the depth of sincerity of heart.¹

Speaking on the classification of religious approaches into three basic groups, the Dvaita, the Visishthadvaita, and Advaita, Swamiji says:

All of religion is contained in the Vedanta, that is, in the three stages of the Vedanta philosophy, the Dvaita, Visishthadvaita and Advaita; one comes after the other. These are the three stages of spiritual growth in man. Each one is necessary. This is the essential of religion: the Vedanta, applied to the various ethnic customs and creeds of India, is Hinduism. The first stage, i.e. Dvaita, applied to the ideas of the ethnic groups of Europe, is Christianity; as applied to the Semitic groups, Mohammedanism. The Advaita, as applied in its Yoga-perception form, is Buddhism etc. Now by religion is meant the Vedanta; the

1. *Prabuddha Bharata*, 1902, p. 150.

applications must vary according to the different needs, surroundings, and other circumstances of different nations.²

Thus the life of Sri Ramakrishna and the Mission (or Organization) that bears his holy name are a prayerful urge to all human beings to be full of God and to manifest divinity in every movement of life. All the activities of persons connected directly or remotely with the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission are to be judged as fruitful not by the quantum of work or the money expended but by the degree to which those who have consecrated themselves to the divine mission are themselves full of God.

At the end of his sadhanas, Sri Ramakrishna had a number of unique revelations. Two of these are very pertinent: (a) that he would have to found a new community especially fit for the liberal faith revealed in his own life; and (b) that those who were in their last birth and those who had even once truly called on God would come to him to attain spirituality.³ These two revelations are explained by Swami Saradananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, by saying that those who are sincere spiritual aspirants (and not those who are lukewarm in their spiritual practices) would be fit persons to accept the novel and liberal ideas which were demonstrated in the life of Sri Ramakrishna, and that a new community would be founded by Sri Ramakrishna being an instrument in the hands of the Divine Mother for the practice and propagation of these sublime ideas.

A study of the life of Sri Ramakrishna reveals that he performed many acts aimed

at establishing religion: (a) He moulded the religious life of his immaculate divine consort, Sri Sarada; (b) He met eminent religious leaders of his time to make their religious lives perfect on the basis of his own realization and power; (c) He helped a number of persons belonging to different denominations who came to him seeking guidance; (d) He classified spiritual aspirants, revealed to him by the Divine Mother in visions, and applied himself to moulding their lives; (e) He initiated some of them into the vows of renouncing their all for the realization of God and founded a brotherhood for propagating his own novel and liberal doctrine; (f) He went repeatedly to the houses of his devotees in Calcutta, and, by means of spiritual conversations and *kirtans*, awakened their spiritual life; (g) He bound his own devotees with a tie of extra-ordinary love and gave shape to a liberal religious body.⁴

If the urge and agony of longing for the Divine Mother experienced by Sri Ramakrishna during the early years of his sadhana can be described as keen and unique, then the anxiety and longing for the coming of the aspirants with an especial spiritual capacity was no less unique and keen. He would spend the day in great anxiety thinking about the aspirants, the pleasant conversations on God he would have with them and the various things he would say or give to each one of them. All this indicated that the Divine Mother gradually made him acutely aware of his life's mission, aware also of the role each of his disciple would play in the divine drama, and revealed his total dedication to the Divine Mother in Her divine task of establishing religion, preserving the virtue of the virtuous and the eradication of the wickedness of the wicked.

The chief among his disciples was his beloved Naren, the later Swami Vivekananda. One day Sri Ramakrishna ex-

2. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), vol. 5, pp. 81-2. [Hereafter, *Complete Works*].

3. *Sri Ramakrishna, The Great Master* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1970), pp. 300-301. [Hereafter, *Great Master*].

4. *Great Master*, p. 684.

pressed a keen desire to pass on to his favourite disciple the yogic powers (*siddhis*) he had with him. He said to Naren, 'If I impart these powers to you, you can use them when necessary. What do you say?' Narendra replied to him with the question, 'Will these help me to realize God?' To this Sri Ramakrishna said, 'No. They will not help you to do that; but they will be very helpful to you when, after realizing God, you will be engaged in doing His work.' This was clear indication that Naren would be commissioned to do the Mother's work. But Naren replied, 'I do not want them. Let me realize God first; maybe I shall then know whether I need them or not. If I accept them now, I may forget my ideal and, making use of them for some selfish powers, come to grief.' This refusal very much pleased Sri Ramakrishna because it revealed that Narendra wanted God and God alone.⁵

Another significant event in the life of Naren was his dedication to the Divine Mother. Being a member of the Brahmo Samaj, Naren did not at first believe in image worship. Sri Ramakrishna therefore had to face the problem of making his beloved Naren accept the Mother. Naren's father having passed away leaving the family in dire difficulties, Naren was constrained to approach Sri Ramakrishna who he believed would appeal to the Mother on his behalf. Sri Ramakrishna took this opportunity to have Naren establish a direct contact with his Mother, a meeting which ended with Naren repeatedly praying to the Universal Mother for devotion and knowledge, totally forgetting in Her divine presence the pecuniary condition he was in. That Naren had accepted the Divine Mother was a matter of great joy for Sri Ramakrishna for it meant

that Naren was tuned to the Mother's mission.⁶

One day Naren pleaded with Sri Ramakrishna saying, 'Everyone has been blessed with some sort of realization. Let me too have something. When all have got it, shall I alone be left out?' This reveals the buoyant spirit of Naren, naturally inclined to deep meditation, one whom no sin could touch, one who could consume every form of tarnish in the human mind and elevate it to a high spiritual plane. Sri Ramakrishna, advising him to make some arrangements for his family, asked him, 'What do you want?' To this Naren replied, 'I wish to remain in Samadhi for three or four days at a stretch breaking it just to take food.' This is a reply that would have more than satisfied any other spiritual teacher. But Sri Ramakrishna referring to the song Narendra loved to sing 'All that exists art Thou', pointed out, 'There is a state higher than that even. Do you not sing, "Thou art all that there is." Come here after making some provisions for your family and you shall realize a state even higher than Samadhi.'⁷

On another occasion, granting Naren his much prayed for realization, Sri Ramakrishna told him that it was the Mother who had revealed to him the mysteries of samadhi, and reiterated that he had work to do on completion of which the treasure-box would once again be opened to him. Naren's entire life was one of giving practical shape to this 'work'.⁸

Sri Ramakrishna always held that Narendranath would shake the world to its foundation for human welfare through the strength of his intellectual and spiritual powers. Once while he was unable to speak owing to the ailment in his throat, Sri Ramakrishna commissioned Narendranath

5. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, by his Eastern and Western Disciples (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1993), vol. 1, pp. 99-100. [Hereafter, *Life, SV*].

6. *Life, SV*, vol. 1, pp. 127-9.

7. *Life, SV*, vol. 1, p. 162.

8. *Life, SV*, vol. 1, p. 178.

for the divine task by writing on a piece of paper: 'Naren will teach others.' When Naren hesitated and said, 'I won't do that,' the Master replied emphatically, 'You shall *have* to do it.'⁹ Thus gradually Sri Ramakrishna made it clear that it was through Narendra that he would accomplish the work of the Divine Mother.

It is relevant to make the observation that Sri Ramakrishna also commissioned Sri Sarada for the divine task on a number of occasions. Once in an aggrieved tone he asked Sri Sarada, 'Well, my dear, won't you do anything? Should this (meaning himself) do everything single-handed?' When Sri Sarada remonstrated asking what she, a woman, could do, Sri Ramakrishna emphasized, 'No, no, you will have to do a lot.' On another occasion he said, 'What, after all, has this one done? You'll have to do much more.' After his mahasamadhi Sri Ramakrishna once appeared to Sri Sarada in a vision and said, 'No, you stay on; there's much still to be done.' And she remained to play her role as the Mother of the Sangha, the Guiding Force and the Spiritual Power behind it.¹⁰

Three or four days remained before Sri Ramakrishna went from 'this room to that room'. He called Narendra and, looking steadfastly at him, entered into deep meditation. A subtle force, resembling an electric shock, entered into Narendra who lost all outer consciousness. Coming to the conscious plane, Narendra found Sri Ramakrishna weeping. On being asked why he wept, Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Oh Naren, to-day I have given you my all and have become a fakir, a penniless beggar. By the force of this power transmitted by me, great things will be done by you; only after that will you go to whence you came.'¹¹ Hence-

forth Sri Ramakrishna worked in and through his beloved disciple Narendranath. Sri Ramakrishna also gave in private many instructions to his favourite disciple. In later years Narendranath used to remark that the power behind him was Sri Ramakrishna. He also affirmed that Sri Ramakrishna always guided him and protected him from all dangers.

One day, in preparation for the monastic life, Sri Ramakrishna instructed the young disciples of his to beg their food from door to door. Sri Ramakrishna taking a grain of the food collected by begging in this manner said, 'Well done! This food is very pure.'¹²

As if to lay the foundation for the future monastic order, one day in January 1886 at Cossipore, Sri Ramakrishna told Gopal (Senior), who intended to distribute ochre cloths and Rudraksha beads to sadhus who would be passing through Calcutta to attend the religious festival at Gangasagar, that he would earn merit by distributing the articles amongst his young disciples who were unparalleled in their purity. Eleven sets of cloth were distributed amongst Narendra, Rakhal, Baburam, Niranjana, Yogindra, Tarak, Shashi, Sharat, Kali, Latu and Gopal Senior. This was the foundation of the Ramakrishna Order. Thus the Master himself initiated the boys into monastic life.¹³ Earlier one day Sri Ramakrishna, looking at his disciples, had remarked, 'Grand!'. On being asked what was grand, Sri Ramakrishna had expressly stated, 'I see that preparations are going on for a grand renunciation.'¹⁴ Thus the Movement began its march to taking a concrete shape.

The role of Narendranath in spreading the liberal doctrine of Sri Ramakrishna was revealed to Sri Sarada in a vision she had on

9. *Life*, SV, vol. 1, p. 182.

10. Swami Gambhirananda, *The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*, (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1977), pp. 120-1. [Hereafter, *Holy Mother*].

11. *Life*, SV, vol. 1, p. 182.

12. *Life*, SV, vol. 1, pp. 163-4.

13. *Life*, SV, vol. 1, p. 177.

14. *Life*, SV, vol. 1, p. 171.

the bank of the holy Ganges while she was staying at Nilambar Mukherjee's house. Suddenly, Sri Ramakrishna emerged from behind and his body of pure spirit rushing past her entered the river and got dissolved in the Brahmapuri (Ganges) which the Hindu tradition holds has been and still is washing the sins of people for ages. Thereafter Swami Vivekananda came into view and, shouting with elation, 'Glory unto Ramakrishna', went on sprinkling handfuls of that sanctified water over millions of people standing by, who thereby became liberated that very moment.¹⁵ It may be recalled in this connection that Swami Vivekananda proceeded to the U.S.A. to attend the Parliament of Religions after getting the direction from the Master himself in a vision and being confirmed in the mandate by the express direction of the Holy Mother.

These spiritual visions and her keen intellect led Holy Mother to hold that Narendra's method of working was in accord with Sri Ramakrishna's message. She also knew that Sri Ramakrishna had entered the body of Narendra and was working through him. To remarks that it was not befitting a monk's life to run hospitals or schools, to sell books, to keep accounts, etc., that Sri Ramakrishna had neither done so nor preached to that effect, the Holy Mother firmly held Sri Ramakrishna to be an exception in whose case Mathur and others had been ordained by the Divine Mother to be suppliers of his needs. She pointed out that the monks get their food because they are engaged in some work; otherwise they would have to go about moving from door to door for a morsel of food.¹⁶ The Holy Mother also held that work kept the mind free from distracting thoughts. She also held such acts of service to be acts of worship and saw the tangible presence of Sri Ramakrishna in the midst of and as the inspirer of

such activities. We have come across instances which make us believe that those who are the beneficiaries also profited by thinking that it was through the grace of God that their various secular needs were met by the services of the Mission. Thus the ideal, '*Ātmano mokṣārtham jagaddhitāya ca*, One's own liberation and the good of the world,' implies the good of the world both in the secular and spiritual sense.

It is pertinent to observe in this connection that the monastery at Belur came into being due to the fervent prayer of the Holy Mother to Sri Ramakrishna when she saw, at the end of March 1890, many wealthy monasteries at Bodh Gaya. Her prayer, in part, is an ideal guideline to the monastic members of the Order and also gives the scope of the Movement's activities:

My prayer is, that those who leave the world in your name may never be in need of bare subsistence. They will all live together holding to your ideas and ideals; and the people afflicted with the worries of the world will resort to them and be solaced by hearing about you. That's why you came. My heart is pained to see them wandering about.¹⁷

After the passing away of the Master, Swami Vivekananda formulated a unique scheme of thought for the revivification of the world culture. The chief formative influences that went to determine his vision are: his knowledge of Western philosophy, history and Sanskrit scriptures; the constant study of the divine life of his Guru before him in which he found the key to life and the verification of the Shastras; his own training and realizations; his Master's great prophecies regarding him; his travels all over his motherland and in the West in the course of which he availed himself of the opportunities of comparing: (1) India as she then was with what she had been, of studying the life and thought of the people, their needs and possibilities and the diversities of their cus-

15. *Holy Mother*, p. 173-4.

16. *Holy Mother*, p. 332.

7. *Holy Mother*, p. 332.

toms and faiths, and (2) the Westerners' material affluence, the status of their women, their organizational abilities, the scientific thinking, and their spiritual receptivity. He grasped in its comprehensiveness that vast whole of which his Master's life and personality was but an intense epitome. He found in the message of his Master and Vedanta the theoretical thought-content which could give a new and healthy shape to the thinking of the West and the practical directions for the uplift of the sunken masses of India.

Though out of sequence, an incident in the life at Dakshineswar is worth recalling. It was the year 1884 and the conversation drifted to the religion of the Vaishnavas which enjoined upon its followers the practice of: (1) relish for the name of God, (2) compassion for all living beings, and (3) service of Vaishnavas, the devotees of God. Hardly had Sri Ramakrishna uttered the words 'compassion for all living beings,' he went into samadhi. Coming back to the semiconscious state he said to himself, 'Compassion for creatures! Compassion for creatures! You fool! An insignificant worm crawling on earth, you to show compassion to others! Who are you to show compassion? No, it cannot be. Not compassion for others, but rather service to man, recognizing him to be a veritable manifestation of God.' Narendra found in these words, whose significance went unnoticed by others, a wonderful light—a synthesis between the knowledge of Vedanta which required one to withdraw oneself from society and meditate on the *mahāvākyas* with a mind unwavering like a lamp in a windless place, and such lofty sentiments as are expressed through love and devotion to God. 'He is both the Immanent and Transcendent. It is He who has become all the diverse beings, objects of our love, respect or compassion, and yet He is beyond all these. Such a realization of Divinity in humanity leaves no room for arrogance. By realizing It, a man cannot be jealous of, or have pity for, any

other being. Serving man, knowing him to be the manifestation of God, purifies the heart; and in a short time the aspirant who does this realizes that he is a part of God—Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute.'

One may find it profitable also to recall, in connection with this attitude of service, that it is verily God Himself who helps man. That one is able to meditate, or to serve others in the right spirit, or to deliver effective lectures, or even to understand the subtle truth that is hidden in divine utterances, are all due to the grace of God. It is He who arranges all things suitably so that one may find it convenient to devote oneself to call on Him with a sincere heart and be devoted to His service. This world is too big for any one person or for any one organization to serve effectively. To every one served, often many are returned empty-handed. That should make us humble and sincere in our efforts to do some small work to please God.

In this connection the feeble efforts of the small squirrels to help build the bridge for Sri Rama to cross over to Sri Lanka is worth remembering. Those efforts received much appreciation from Sri Rama, who was God Himself. What He saw therein was the sincerity and not the magnitude of the work. What appealed to Him was that the effort was meant to please Him, not to show off one's achievements. God certainly is pleased with trifles but He demands a heart that is entirely devoted to Him! Therefore, the renunciation of the world is an inescapable component of a truly dedicated and spiritual life. However, as Sri Ramakrishna said, 'When one sees everything filled with God alone, does one see anything else? Does one see any such thing as the world?'

It is held by some that the Ramakrishna Mission derives its inspiration from the organizational efforts in the West. However it must be remembered as pointed out by Kamakhya Nath Mitra:

(Continued on page 491)

Ramakrishna Mission Lokasiksha Parishad, Narendrapur: A Report

What is the Ramakrishna Mission Lokasiksha Parishad doing? On the one hand, there are people who are afflicted, without someone to help them, with their individuality totally crushed. On the other hand, there are individuals and agencies striving to do some good to them. In bringing a sweet union between these two, the Parishad takes into consideration the needs, priorities, problems, opportunities, available skills and possibility for motivation to help men and women stand on their own feet by creating an internal demand for self-improvement. This is achieved through a participatory approach resulting in strategies, education in its widest sense, transfer of technology & know-how, research & evaluation, and feedback which ensure total development of the beneficiaries in the target area. In short, the Parishad demonstrates the power and possibilities of organized work besides asserting that one has to raise oneself by one's own effort. This report is based on the journal Gramseva 1996 issued by the Parishad.

The present rural development work conducted by the Ramakrishna Mission Lokasiksha Parishad (an Institute of Social Welfare and Integrated Rural Development) at Narendrapur, had its inception in the slum development work which began far back in 1952. It all started with a small Students' Home in Jadulal Mullick Road of North Calcutta. The students of the Home were inspired by Swami Lokeswaranandaji Maharaj, the Founder-Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama (then at Pathuriaghata) of which the Parishad is a unit, to do something for the unfortunate people of the slum at Rambagan.¹ In the beginning, at the instance of the Swami, students who were about to finish their college education launched an Adult Education Programme and gradually diversified their activities making elaborate arrangement for

training of the slum-dwellers as useful citizens. There grew up ultimately an institution, the VIVEKANANDA SOCIAL WELFARE CENTRE. In 1956-57, the small Students' Home was shifted to its present site at Narendrapur (then known as Ukhila-Paikapara). As the Ashrama was located in a rural area, the authorities paid serious attention to rural development work. Thus came into being the LOKASIKSHA PARISHAD in 1956-57. Thus students studying in colleges and universities under the inspiration and able guidance of a sannyasin carried on community welfare activities as early as 1952 and sowed the seeds for the later growth of an institute of social welfare and integrated rural development.

From the beginning the Parishad emphasized identification of local resources, forming local organizations, and building up local leadership. These organized local units, the Parishad felt, if properly guided and motivated, could become regular institutions engaged in comprehensive community development. Now, as earlier envisioned, rural youth clubs, numbering more

1. See *Prabuddha Bharata*, January, 1994, p. 69, for a report on the activities at Rambagan; Also see *Prabuddha Bharata*, January, 1995, p. 227, for a recent report on the Rural Development Work of Ramakrishna Mission.

than a thousand, are registered institutions and are working wholeheartedly in different spheres of activity for the development of poorer sections of society. This development came about to a great extent through adult literacy activities. This constitutes what is now known as the FIELD WING of the Parishad.

Establishment of the Gramsevak Training Centre (since renamed Agricultural Training Centre) in 1967 helped the Parishad a great deal by functioning as the Training Wing of its organization.

The Field Wing and the Training Wing of the Parishad have created a great impact upon the rural community. This has been evident over the years from the increasing demand from the rural youth for extending training opportunities to other youth clubs. It is a matter of great satisfaction that the Parishad is now treated by different Ministries of the State and Central Government as a National Resource Centre!

In 1979 a National Resource Centre called Information Development And Resource Agency (IDARA) for the Nehru Yuva Kendras of the eastern and northeastern states was established here with financial assistance from the Ministry of Education and Culture, Government of India. The IDARA (now under the Ministry of Human Resource Development) continues to work as before. Besides, the Parishad is now linked to various fields of work in close collaboration with the ministries. In 1984, with assistance from the Ministry of Human Resource Development, a Polyvalent (multifaceted) Adult Education Centre called Shramik Vidyapeeth was instituted here for the education and training of people belonging to the working class. Besides, a Training Orientation and Research Centre (TORC) was set up here in 1985, as a part of the National Service Scheme, with assistance from the Ministry of Human Resource Development. Another unit known as Farming Systems Research was also set up for the comprehen-

sive development of the poor farming community in collaboration with several other leading institutions of the country.

The Parishad is also working in close collaboration with the State Government. Several training programmes like Farmers' Sons' Training, Entrepreneurship Development, Social Welfare Inspectors' Training, and so on are conducted here with assistance from various departments of the Government of West Bengal.

In course of time, many an organization within the country and abroad, began to send candidates to Narendrapur for training in rural development. Organizations like the Asia Centre of the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP), Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), several nationalized banks, and different Government and Non-Government agencies like the UNDP send their personnel/trainees to our Institution for training and field placement.

As is well known, the Ramakrishna Mission, following Swami Vivekananda's plan, believes in (i) restoring man's faith in himself, (ii) making him manifest his latent potentialities, and (iii) gradually making him aware of his own responsibility towards his self-development. For this purpose it organizes the local people, particularly the youth, to enable them to do everything by themselves depending on their own leadership and resources as far as possible. Thus the prime goals of the Lokasiksha Parishad have been to train, educate, and motivate individuals to grow up as good community-minded citizens, and to build up village level organizations (youth clubs) to grow into self-help groups responsible for initiating all their self-development efforts. The Parishad thus began by building up a few youth clubs as self-help groups. These groups grew to a huge number and, to ensure efficient management, the Parishad developed an effective network of administrative and feedback channels.

These 'federations' at all levels are

equally and democratically represented by village level youth clubs. All the clubs and the federations are registered elected groups which work together on joint decisions. This networking has helped (i) good systematization and linkage, (ii) development of an auto-monitoring system, (iii) facilitate follow up, (iv) in implementation of the programmes and projects, (v) in the development of a strong sense of accountability, and (vi) democratic functioning of the groups at all levels. Initially the Parishad used to affiliate all the village level clubs. The number of clubs having risen enormously, the Parishad decided to strengthen the clusters and district level federations so that affiliation of a village level organization might be efficiently taken care of by the federations. Now, any club seeking affiliation to the Parishad is referred to the federation concerned.

The Lokasiksha Parishad functions primarily as a resource centre, though the Parishad also has a band of efficient field level workers which functions as a peer group (i) to train the youth workers, (ii) to see to their effective functioning, and (iii) to provide the clubs, the federations, and the Parishad with their feedbacks for improvement of programmes and systematization. Besides, every senior person of the Parishad has to function as the Desk Officer of a particular federation area. From the Lokasiksha Parishad's side the Desk Officer is responsible for the proper functioning of the clubs and the federations.

ACTIVITIES OF THE TRAINING WING

The Training Wing of the Ramakrishna Mission Lokasiksha Parishad was started with the introduction of the Agricultural Training Centre (formerly called the Gram Sevak Training Centre). Subsequently, the Parishad felt the need for extending training facilities to all rural vocational activities like small scale industries, rural entrepreneurship, and other important aspects of people's daily lives. The Parishad started receiving requests for such training in great

number. The Government of India, particularly the Ministry of Human Resource Development, also thought along similar lines. Consequently, a few important programmes of this Ministry were added to the Training Wing to convert it into a big resource centre for student development and for the development of the non-student youth in the eastern regions of the country. Thus, as programmes like the Information Development And Resource Agency (IDARA), Shramik Vidyapeeth, and Training Orientation and Resource Centre (TORC) came to be added, the Parishad was more able to fulfil the demand for training. The activities of the Training Wing are narrated below.

1. The Agricultural Training Centre

The Gram Sevak Training Centre of the Parishad, established in January 1967, was upgraded in 1971 and renamed Agricultural Training Centre. Initially it functioned as a two-year integrated course for village level agricultural technologists of the Department of Agriculture. Subsequently it was upgraded for imparting a one-year in-service training course also. To strengthen the infrastructural facilities, a workshop wing was added in 1979-80. This is the only Government sponsored Agricultural Training Centre in West Bengal.

The main object of this centre is to give training to grassroots level extension workers of the Agriculture and Rural Development Department, that is, to Krishi Prayukti Sahayak (KPS), to selected farmers and farmers' sons, etc. in agricultural and agro-allied technologies. The aim is to equip them with knowledge and skills and to motivate them to adopt technology for higher production, more income and a higher standard of living. Necessary supplementary training in rural industries, cooperatives, public health, nutrition, and Panchayat operation is also imparted to enable assistance to rural people for all-round development. Apart from

Ramakrishna Mission Lokasiksha Parishad Narendrapur

Training Wing

1. Agricultural Training Centre

2. Information Development And Resource Agency

- 2.1 Review of NYK Programme
- 2.2 Training Programme
- 2.3 Selection of National Service Volunteers
- 2.4 Orientation Programme for the CYP Awardees
- 2.5 Workshop of IDARA
- 2.6 Team Appraisal on the Status of Youth Club
- 2.7 National Youth Festival
- 2.8 Consultancy Services
- 2.9 Counselling

3. Shramik Vidyapeeth

4. Field Training Institute for Urban Basic Services Programme

5. Training Orientation and Research Centre

Field Wing with 33 Cluster Organizations and 1500 associated/affiliated Youth Organizations

1. Child Development Programme

- 1.1 Non-formal Education
- 1.2 Creche
- 1.3 Chalaman Vahini
- 1.4 Balwadi
- 1.5 Early Childhood Education Project
- 1.6 Child Development Programme-Murshidabad and Bardhaman
- 1.7 Family Helper Project
- 1.8 Integrated Child Development Project-North Calcutta

2. Educational Programme

- 2.1 Post-Literacy Campaign
- 2.2 Library Service
- 2.3 Innovative Education Project
- 2.4 Integrated Child Development Training Centre-Media
- 2.5 Publication
- 2.6 Audio-Visual Unit
- 2.7 Night High School
- 2.8 Night High School: A Study Centre of National Open School

3. Environmental Sanitation, Health and Family Welfare Programme

- 3.1 Control of Diarrhoeal Diseases through supply of safe water and Sanitation-Midnapore
- 3.2 Health and Family Welfare
- 3.3 Sanitation Mart
- 3.4 Improved Smokeless Oven
- 3.5 Nutrition Education and Extension Programme

4. Integrated Rural Development

- 4.1 Rural Development Project-Sunderbans, Phase III
- 4.2 Rural Development Project-Bankura
- 4.3 Rural Development Project-Bardhaman
- 4.4 Rural Development Project (Vivekananda Gramvikash Prakalpa)-Latur

5. Extension and Research Programme

- 5.1 Sericulture
- 5.2 Central Sector Agricultural Extension Scheme
- 5.3 Operation Research Project on Pisciculture
- 5.4 Collective Forage Research Scheme
- 5.5 Soil Testing Laboratory

6. Development of Thrift and Credit Groups (Jivan Deep) and Auditing

7. Development of Cottage Industries & Rural Entrepreneurship

8. Participatory or Joint Forest Management

9. Alternative and Non-conventional Sources of Energy Programme

- 9.1 Indo-US Renewable Energy Project
- 9.2 Aditya, the Solar Shop
- 9.3 Bio-gas Extension Programme

10. Training-cum-Production Programme

- 10.1 Carpentry Unit
- 10.2 Beekeeping and Honey Processing
- 10.3 Food Processing
- 10.4 Animal Husbandry and Poultry Keeping
- 10.5 Advanced Photography Laboratory

11. Research and Evaluation Cell

12. Miscellaneous Programmes

- 12.1 Special Events
- 12.2 Meetings, Seminars, Workshops etc.

the training of grassroots workers, the centre also conducts a large number of useful short term training courses in collaboration with various Government and non-Government organizations.

2. Information Development And Resource Agency (IDARA)

This is a resource centre for Government sponsored Nehru Yuva Kendras (NYK) in east and northeast India. In fact since the inception of the Nehru Yuva Kendras in 1972 for the non-student youth, the Government of India was looking for capable organizations to train the Youth Coordinators of the NYKs. One of the organizations identified for the purpose was the Ramakrishna Mission Lokasiksha Parishad (Narendrapur) which has been conducting training of NYK personnel since 1976. In 1979 the Government decided to establish Information Development And Resource Agencies as resource centres of the NYKs and since then the IDARA at Narendrapur has been functioning as the resource centre for the NYKs of 90 districts in the eastern regions and 67 districts in the northeastern regions. Since the establishment of Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan in 1987, the IDARA at Narendrapur has been working in close collaboration with the Department of Youth Affairs and Sports and NYK Sangathan.

The programme and activities undertaken by the IDARA unit during the year 1996 include the following:

2.1 Review of the NYK programmes of administration was made in 18 of its Kendras (Centres) in West Bengal, Sikkim and Bihar. Besides, the IDARA personnel visited 50 youth clubs in different districts of the eastern region to participate in their programmes and to initiate the process of youth club development.

2.2 Training Programmes for youth leadership with special emphasis on Youth Club Management, including accounts management were conducted. In three such leader-

ship training courses, altogether 100 youth representatives from different youth organizations affiliated to the Parishad took part. A three-day Intensive Training on Survey Methodology for volunteers of youth clubs was held, along with orientation training for the National Service Volunteers for the Nehru Yuva Kendras, IDARA personnel acting as resource persons. A Vocational training programme was held for opening up avenues to the rural youth for self-employment, including farm and non-farm activities through 10 courses benefitting 250 participants.

2.3 Selection of National Service Volunteers.

2.4 An Orientation Programme for the Commonwealth Youth Programme Awardees in which there were 11 awardees from seven countries. The awardees were taken to different youth organizations to show them the youth work of the Ramakrishna Mission in particular and that of the country in general.

2.5 Workshop of IDARA (Narendrapur) aimed at developing a monitoring tool for the Project 'Youth Action: Goal 2000, Education for All, Health for All', was held.

2.6 A Team Appraisal on the Status of Youth Clubs.

2.7 National Youth Festival in which the IDARA, Narendrapur participated.

2.8 Consultancy Services.

2.9 Counselling for training, planning and organizing youth programmes.

3. Shramik Vidyapeeth

Since its inception in 1984 as an active part of the adult education drive of the Lokasiksha Parishad, the Shramik Vidyapeeth (SVP) has been imparting life-enrichment education and training to both the organized and unorganized sectors of the working class people, to their family members, and to all categories of unemployed youth. SVP helps its target population meet their sorely neglected needs for professional, economic, social and cultural development. It has so far offered education and

training in areas like: (i) Technical and vocational education in different trades, (ii) Worker and his environment, (iii) Job safety, (iv) Basic services and education, (v) Employer-Employee relationship, (vi) Worker's understanding: local, national and international, (vii) Cultural and personality enrichment, (viii) Education on family life, (ix) Health and hygiene, (x) Drive against drug abuse, etc., (xi) Language courses, and (xii) Literacy.

The participants in SVP programmes were not only from around Narendrapur and South Calcutta but also from far-off districts of West Bengal like Bardhaman, Midnapore, Hooghly, Howrah, Nadia, Murshidabad, Malda, Jalpaiguri, etc. SVP organizes its education and training activities not merely on its campus at Narendrapur but in slums, industrial colonies, the premises of its collaborating agencies, and so on. Its services are extended to a wide range of organizations such as youth clubs, women's groups, educational institutions, social welfare organizations, industries like Tata Tea, Inland Agent, Star Engineering (India), Soap Chemicals, RICO Sewing Co., etc. Some of the major trades in which courses were conducted by SVP were: motor mechanics, motor driving, refrigeration and air-conditioning, radio and T.V., electric wiremanship, telephone operating, computer (hardware), welding, designed dress-making, silk-screen printing, commercial art, garment making, machine knitting, photography, etc. Of the organized courses 24 per cent were conducted on the SVP campus and the remaining 76 per cent in slums, industrial colonies, and in some educational institutions. Of the 1337 participants 631 were industrial workers or daily wage earners, 517 were prospective workers, and 189 were self-employed.

4. Field Training Institute for Urban Basic Services Programmes (UBSP)

The Urban Basic Service which has

been operative in India over a period of two decades addresses itself to the disadvantaged slum population within a Community Focussed Framework. Urban Basic Services for the Poor (UBSP) has three poverty alleviation schemes: the Nehru Rozgar Yojana for the urban poor; housing for the economically weaker sections; and the environmental improvement of urban slums. The UBSP produced a qualitative difference in the lives of 30 per cent of the urban poor and improved urban environment at a relatively low cost. It ushered in a ray of hope in the lives of many millions of severely disadvantaged children and women. The objective of the UBSP is to integrate the various programmes and services for slum development and to call for a conscious participation of the community to make the process of slum development evolve out of the needs and aspirations of the slum dwellers. The main focus of UBSP is on children and women who have been the worst sufferers and the most neglected. In all, 23 municipalities in 10 districts of West Bengal have been identified for the implementation of UBSP.

5. Training Orientation and Research Centre (TORC)

Established by the Government of India, TORC, Narendrapur, aims at imparting training to the programme officers of National Service Scheme and initiating research and evaluation of the programme.

ACTIVITIES OF THE FIELD WING

As seen earlier, the Field Wing of the Parishad started with adult literacy activities carried on by the students of colleges and universities under the guidance and inspiration of a sannyasin. Slowly the activities diversified. It is indeed difficult to present these activities in detail and an attempt is made merely to present a cursory view. For convenience, the discussion has been grouped into sections and sub-sections thereunder as embodied in the annual re-

port, *Gramseva*, 1996. The classification stems from differences in the nature of service including phasing where necessary, the financing agency, the district and the target group to which the benefits are directed. For the reader who merely wishes to get a concise picture of the gamut of activities, it is sufficient to mention that the areas covered are: (i) Non-formal and early childhood education, (ii) Introduction of nutritious food for children, (iii) Examination of the health of children, (iv) Promotion of activities aimed at recreation and development of physique of children and youth, (v) Integrated child development in slums, (vi) Publication of primers, (vii) Vocational training in 59 trades, (viii) Introducing economic programmes for creating employment opportunities, (ix) Publication of books on rural vocation, (x) Introducing environmental protection measures, social forestry, etc., (xi) Collective forage research scheme, (xii) Audio Visual Programmes, (xiii) Promotion of rural libraries, (xiv) Publication of a monthly, *Samaj Siksha*, in Bengali and two quarterly magazines, *Gramseva* and *Samaj Seva* in English, (xv) Organizing seminars and conferences at the State and national levels, and (xvi) Research and Evaluation.

1. Child Development Programme

This programme addresses itself to children. It has many components all aimed at child development, though it oftentimes involves the parents, specially the mother.

1.1 Non-Formal Education: The Parishad has been conducting non-formal education programme in rural areas since its inception. It is estimated that upto December 1995 the Parishad inducted more than 33 thousand children into formal education through its non-formal education centres. Besides, the Parishad also developed a research wing called Janasiksha Gaveshana Vibhag to prepare teaching/learning materials for non-formal education of different categories.

Recognized by the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT), the Parishad has been developing teaching/learning materials for instructors/learners, distributing these materials to different agencies in the eastern regions of India, preparing training modules for the literacy imparting personnel, and conducting training programmes, seminars, workshops, etc.

1.2 Creche: In rural areas women who are housewives, maids and widows engage themselves in agriculture and other avenues of production mostly as daily labourers, or work in their own family farms. Women also take part in procuring inputs and in selling agricultural products. The Creche programme sponsored by the Central Social Welfare Board through the State Social Welfare Advisory Board takes care of children in the age group 2 to 5 years in the creche centres when their mothers are at work. The activities of the creche programme include: (i) Pre-school education, (ii) Physical and cultural training, (iii) Health checkup, (iv) Immunization, (v) Mothers' meeting for awareness development, (vi) Monthly meeting of supervisors for internal evaluation, and (vii) Follow up work for enrolment in primary schools. In all, 1000 children are participating in this programme.

1.3 Chalaman Vahini (The Mobile Squad): The mobile squad consists of a team of workers who, with educational aids, move about in villages imparting training to children through games, songs and physical exercises so that their life becomes joyful.

1.4 Balwadi: In rural areas, particularly in socio-economically backward areas, children need to be provided with the basic facility of education and training. To fulfil this need the Parishad, during the year 1996, ran three Balwadi Centres, one each in the districts of South 24 Parganas, Nadia and Birbhum. The centres provided facilities for 120 children.

1.5 Early Childhood Education Project: This

concerns children in the age group 3 to 5 years who live in areas inhabited by poor and ignorant people. Children's health and nutrition are often neglected due to extreme poverty and lack of awareness. As a result children's diseases and malnutrition are common features. The early childhood education project is sponsored by the Department of Women & Child Welfare, Government of India. The Parishad has been running 402 centres in 41 blocks distributed in 7 districts of West Bengal benefitting 16,080 children.

1.6 Child Development Programme at Murshidabad and Bardhaman: The Children's Programme, supported by German Agro Action, is being implemented in four villages, namely, Mankara, Fatenagar, Bausmari and Gamila, for the last three years, through Sevavrata, the district level federation of youth organizations in the district of Murshidabad. It includes education, nutrition and recreation for children, entrepreneurship among parents particularly the mother, environmental sanitation, health services, etc. In each of the four centres there are 50 children supported by the association of the mothers of the children.

With resource support from German Agro Action, a similar programme is being run by Deepan Yuba Gosthi at Bardhaman. The district level youth council affiliated to the Parishad supervised the implementation of the programme and provided technical guidance for running the programme effectively.

1.7 Family Helper Project (FHP): While development of the children is the main concern of this programme, it works with a community based approach—a child with its family as the unit for development. FHP is an integrated programme directed to the survival, protection, healthy growth and development of children in most needy communities in rural, tribal and urban locations. It is mainly a human resource development programme assisting needy children, their

families, and the community through its sponsorship programme. Through its holistic and integrated approach, it not only caters to the educational, health, nutritional and cultural needs of the children, but also encompasses housing, environmental sanitation, family welfare, social forestry, small savings, women empowerment, income generation, etc. of the target community as a whole.

The Lokasiksha Parishad Family Helper Project is now working in seven Arapanch group of villages, namely, Arapanch, Natagacchi, Pathathala, Kelegore, Gopalpur, Ramchandrapur and Hasanpur.

1.8 Integrated Child Development Project, North Calcutta: The Integrated Child Development Service Scheme (ICDS Scheme) aims at maternal and child welfare. It was started on 2 October 1975 at Manbazar. It is the only project run by a voluntary organization in the State of West Bengal. The objectives of the scheme are: (i) to improve the nutritional and health status of children up to 6 years of age, (ii) to lay the foundation for proper psychological, physical and social development of the child, (iii) to reduce the incidence of mortality, morbidity, malnutrition, and school drop-out, and (iv) to enhance the capability of the mother to look to the normal health and nutritional needs of the child. These objectives are realized through: (i) providing supplementary nutrition, (ii) Immunization, (iii) Health Check-up, (iv) Referral service, (v) Treatment of minor ailments, (vi) Nutrition and health education for women, and (vii) Non-formal pre-school education for children in the age group 3 to 6 years. The project covers 1,09,356 slum dwellers in Calcutta in 19 wards of the Municipal Corporation. Besides, the ICDS undertook special programmes such as: (i) Survey for identification of handicapped persons, (ii) Referral services for the physically handicapped persons, (iii) Creation of community chest fund, and (iv) Income generating activities.

2. Educational Programmes

2.1 Post Literacy Campaign: The Ramakrishna Mission strongly believes that education is the most powerful instrument for bringing about development. Wherever it worked, the Parishad introduced educational programmes for children, youth and adults. Besides, the Parishad has also been participating in all national adult education programmes. Earlier, the Parishad had launched the Mass Literacy Programme in 5 districts with assistance from the National Literacy Mission, Government of India, the Mass Education and Extension Department of the Government of West Bengal, the local administration and the Panchayats. After completion of the first phase of the programme, the Parishad took up the second phase, the Post Literacy Programme, with the objectives: (i) to continue the campaign for enrolment of non-school going children in the age group 5 to 8 years, (ii) to conduct the basic literacy course for the learners who either could not meet the norms of the National Literacy Mission (NLM), or did not attend basic literacy course, or had dropped out, and (iii) to help the non-literate who had attained the norms of NLM acquire additional skills so that they may be able to retain their acquired skills.

2.2 Library Services: The Parishad has been extending the library services almost since its inception to three categories of readers: (i) rural masses associated with youth clubs. A mobile section of the library service provides books to various youth clubs, and numerous housewives, mothers and workers borrow books. (ii) the members of the staff and the students and trainees get the benefit of using the reading room and borrowing books from the institution's library which has reference books, text books, journals and annual numbers. (iii) poor and meritorious students who can take advantage of a book bank. Students living in the neighbourhood and in rural areas are provided with text books. During the year the mobile section of

the library circulated 9725 volumes through 53 cluster organizations and youth clubs.

2.3 Innovative Education Project: During the 40 years of imparting elementary and non-formal education, the Parishad discerned a number of shortcomings in both these types of education. To correct this an innovative experimental project was started in the Sonarpur Development Block of South 24-Parganas which is one of the areas where the Parishad has grassroots level organization and infrastructure. On the basis of a benchmark survey 47 Village Education Centres (VEC) have been established in different endemic villages of 11 Gram Panchayats and 3 VECs in 2 Municipal Wards of Sonarpur-Rajpur Municipality.

Children in the age group 6 to 14 years who did not attend the local primary school or have dropped out were the target group. The parents of these children were convinced the need for primary education. The working hours of the VECs were so fixed as to offer maximum benefit to the working children. The response was overwhelming and even resulted in an exodus from the primary school to these centres. A need based curriculum was developed after visiting the endemic villages and interacting with the villagers. Vocational courses for children in the age group 10 to 14 years included such areas in which the children are normally kept engaged by the parents: home gardening, poultry rearing, tailoring, bag stitching, arts and crafts.

2.4 Integrated Child Development Training Centre, Media: Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) aims at an all-round development of children. The Anganwari workers implemented the various activities like supplementary feeding, immunization, health check up, referral services, educational programmes, etc. For the training of these Anganwari workers, the Parishad established the Anganwari Training Centre at Media Chhatra Kalyan Samity. The centre also undertook activities like formation of

mothers' group, formation of children's group, exhibition, youth festival, a seminar on the efficacy of breast feeding, etc.

2.5 Publication: Over the years the Parishad has developed a publication unit which brings out (i) a monthly journal on rural development, *Samaj Siksha*, in Bengali, (ii) post-literacy books on different vocational activities, literature, and religious aspects, and (iii) reports on various studies conducted by the Parishad from time to time. Several books published by the Parishad have been recognized by the National Literacy Mission, and Non-formal and Adult Education Department (Govt. of West Bengal). Some of these books have been selected by the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education as rapid reader for school students.

2.6 Audio Visual Unit: This unit was established for providing the rural masses in far off areas with a better opportunity for access to latest information and recreation. A number of 16 mm films of educational and recreational value were screened on a regular basis and on request. During 1996 the unit exhibited 118 shows benefitting 1,07,500 viewers of 269 villages in the districts of South 24 Parganas, Midnapore, Nadia, Hooghly, and North 24 Parganas and in Calcutta.

2.7 Night High School: Even a decade ago, people depended mainly on agriculture for survival. Today there is a flourish of power-driven cottage industries. Hence, many are engaged in production oriented activities and therefore do not get opportunity for school education. The Night High School was opened with the objective of imparting formal education as well as skill development of the productive sections of the populace: agricultural labourers, technicians, and industrial workers. The objective also included vocational training for the unemployed. In the formal schooling system it takes ten years to get to secondary level education, a dream for the children of poverty stricken rural families. This was con-

densed into seven years with six month semesters for the first to sixth standard followed by a year each for the seventh to tenth standard. Normally students in the age group 10 to 25 years are admitted to these schools. The students are provided nutritious tiffin against a small payment of rupees ten per month and they are provided with text books from the book bank of the Parishad. In addition, the school provides the students with healthy educative recreation. Recitals, musicals and other cultural programmes including excursions are periodically organized.

2.8 Night High School: A Study Centre of National Open School: The Government of India, with the same idea in view as that of the Parishad's Night High School, established the National Open School. The Parishad lost no time to make the Night High School an accredited study centre of the National Open School.

3. Environmental Sanitation, Health and Family Welfare Programmes

3.1 Control of Diarrhoeal Diseases through supply of safe water and Sanitation at Midnapore: The Intensive Sanitation Project (ISP) started functioning in the district of Midnapore in March 1990. It covered the basic areas of environmental sanitation like triggering a demand for sanitation facilities, making necessary arrangements for supplying these facilities, and initiating programmes and activities to continuously motivate people to accept and utilize these facilities. In 1996 the Intensive Sanitation Project was redesignated to include control of diarrhoeal diseases through supply of safe water, proper sanitation and observances of hygiene.

3.2 Health and Family Welfare: In the course of its development, the Parishad opened a medical wing in its premises to provide essential medical services like first aid, immunization, family welfare, health check up and medical advice to the people of the neighbourhood as well as to those in the

Arapanch group of villages. The Parishad also participated in the National Pulse Polio Programme inoculating 1368 children. This also included extensive campaign for ensuring the overall success of the programme.

3.3 Sanitary Mart: All the previous programmes on sanitation and safe environment had a strong subsidy bias. There was no attempt to promote sanitation as a package to ensure 'total sanitation'. Thus although most of the rural population were informed from time to time about the desirability of toilets, yet the necessity for soak pits, garbage pits, smokeless ovens, etc. as essential components of sanitation was not usually underlined. This programme therefore aimed at demand generation through dissemination of information, education and sanitation work as well as development of 'sanitary' latrines at easily affordable costs for the poorest of the poor. The programme also included adequate delivery system wherefrom the facilities could be procured. During 1996, thirteen voluntary organizations affiliated to the Parishad undertook Sanitary Mart activities in the districts of South 24-Parganas, North 24-Parganas, Nadia, Murshidabad, Howrah, Bankura, Burdwan and Purulia.

3.4 Improved Smokeless Ovens (Chullahs): Much has been said and written against the traditional use of old model ovens for cooking purposes but little or no measures have been taken to eliminate the smoke nuisance caused by burning coal, firewood, etc. Only 5 to 10 per cent of the total heat generated is utilized in such ovens which, besides, pose serious health hazards. The Parishad has therefore been laying emphasis on the promotion of improved smokeless chullahs. In 25 villages 80 to 90 per cent of the households have been covered by this scheme. During the year about 3000 chullahs have been installed against a cumulative total of 99,870.

3.5 Nutrition Education and

gramme: Although the programmes concerning the development of children and women address themselves to their nutritional needs, the Parishad has employed a specialized team for the promotion of nutrition education and extension in villages around Narendrapur and in the Arapanch group of villages. The team demonstrated the preparation of low cost nutritious food in each of 15 villages on a regular basis. In each demonstration 30 mothers participated. During the year, the unit also arranged for 4 exhibitions and video shows on the various aspects of nutrition.

4. Integrated Rural Development

After serving the rural masses for about 15 years, the Parishad focussed its attention on their economic uplift. The integrated development aims at augmenting the agricultural productivity and the promotion of human and animal resources. Taking cluster villages as the operation unit, the needs, priorities, problems and opportunities of the area were analysed through a participatory exchange and the development alternatives were finalized to give shape to the Integrated Rural Development Programme. During the year 1996 this project was implemented in Sunderbans, Bankura and Bardhaman in West Bengal, and in Latur in Maharashtra.

4.1 Rural Development Project, Sunderbans (Phase-III): This project is unique in the sense that environmental, social and sustainable economic aspects have been considered while making the action plan and remote, isolated, less-privileged and cyclone-prone hazardous islands were chosen as the operational area. The activities under phase-III included: (i) Micro-level Infrastructure Development, (ii) Income Generation, (iii) Eco-development, and (iv) Location-specific on-farm Applied Research. Altogether 17 youth clubs, 44 villages and 2787 families were covered. The best coverage of families was made by agri-horti-fodder production pro-

gramme followed by small enterprises (610), composite fish culture (249), integrated fish farming (153) and land shaping (132).

4.2 Rural Development Project, Bankura: Supported by the German Agro Action, the several objectives of this project are the same as in Sunderbans but some of the specific objectives are: (i) to increase the productivity and stability of agro-ecosystem in general and agricultural production in particular, (ii) to uplift the socio-economic condition of the people living below the poverty line, and (iii) to step up the level of awareness about scientific methods and technologies in the area of farming and allied activities with a view to ensuring greater productivity and income. The project activities include: (i) On-station Crop Demonstration, (ii) On-farm Methods Demonstration in the farmers' fields, (iii) Training, and (iv) Economic Development. Besides the above activities, other programmes like small savings, installation of bio-gas, non-mulberry sericulture, mulberry sericulture, etc. were also undertaken.

4.3 Rural Development Project, Bardhaman: To ameliorate the economic status of resource-poor farmers as well as of agricultural labourers, a Rural Development Programme financially supported by the German Agro Action has been implemented by Deepan Yuba Gosthi. The project covers 15 villages in Rayna Block-I and 18 villages in Khadgarh Block of Bardhaman District. The Parishad supervised the implementation and the follow-up programmes. During the year a total of 830 users were assisted in farm and non-farm activities.

4.4 Rural Development Project (Vivekananda Gramvikash Prakalpa), Latur: Even after four years we cannot but recall the gruesome night of 30 September 1993, when scores of villages of Latur and Osmanabad districts of Maharashtra were razed to the ground by a massive earthquake with an intensity of 6.4 in the Richter Scale leaving an estimated more than 5000 people dead, many more

injured and an overall loss of several hundred crores of rupees. The Mission started emergency relief with distribution of cooked food, garments, food materials, etc. Subsequently, the Mission also constructed 646 houses for families in the three villages.

A post-house follow-up programme was evolved for perpetual maintenance of the community structure as well as for integrated development of the rehabilitated villagers. On the one hand, the villagers had to be made aware of their responsibilities in community living, and on the other, ample opportunities were to be extended for their economic rehabilitation, non-formal education, vocational training, nutrition, health care, sanitation facility, environmental protection, social & cultural development, etc. The action plan formulated on the basis of a survey of the three villages include: (i) Demonstration of Kitchen Gardening in Samaj Mandir Campus, (ii) Compost (Celrich) trials on vegetable and field crop in farmers' fields, (iii) Demonstration in Compost making, (iv) Demonstration of Enhanced Vegetable Production, (v) Sanitation Programme, (vi) Primary Medical Care, (vii) Installation of fuel-economy chullahs, (viii) Afforestation, (ix) Cultural Activities, and (x) Several Training Programmes.

5. Extension and Research Programme

5.1 Sericulture: The district of Murshidabad has been proven suitable for growing mulberry for hundreds of years. On the other hand, in the sub-humid tropics of West Bengal, particularly in the districts of Purulia and Bankura, Arjunas, the important host plants of non-mulberry silk worms, grow well. In these locations, income generating activities based on both mulberry and non-mulberry silk production were started by the Parishad. During the year *mulberry silk production* and extension programme financed mainly by NABARD and partly by the Central Silk Board was implemented by Sevavrata at Sargachi in the district of Mur-

shidabad under the guidance of the Parishad. The project aimed at imparting training to youth, particularly women, in producing the silk cocoons and making finished products so that they could establish self-sufficient units with assistance. For the benefit of those already engaged in mulberry production, training facilities were extended. Small demonstration units also formed a part of the scheme. Tasar, a kind of *non-mulberry silk*, is produced mainly in the districts of Purulia and Bankura where the land is degraded and the rainfall low, making it especially suitable for the cultivation of Arjuna, a Tasar food plant. The activities of the year 1996 included supervision and monitoring of host plantations already grown, helping the growers in rearing Tasar worms, facilitating marketing arrangements, production and supply of disease-free larvae to the growers, and processing the Tasar cocoons. Sponsored by the Central Silk Board, 9992 hectare of land was already under host plantation involving 1,54,07,629 plants which included Arjuna, Asana, Siddha and Sal. An estimated 5253 growers are engaged in the non-mulberry silk production.

5.2 Central Sector Agricultural Extension Scheme: Continued technological breakthrough in recent years has necessitated updating of technological packages in agriculture and farm-related enterprises. Implemented in the district of South 24 Parganas, the broad objectives of the scheme are to increase the production and productivity of the resource-poor farmers by transferring technologies and by providing feedback information to the research and extension department. The scheme was implemented through 29 youth clubs and 6 cluster organizations spread over 6 blocks, Mathurapur-II, Patharprotima, Sonarpur, Namkhana, Falta and Joynagar.

5.3 Operational Research Project on Pisciculture: The cost of chemical fertilizers is ever on the increase. The Operational Research

Project aims at demonstrating of the use of different kinds of organic waste and bio-fertilizers as substitutes for chemical fertilizers in aquaculture. Monitored by the Central Institute for Freshwater Aquaculture (CIFA), one of its ten centres is located at the Lokasiksha Parishad. The objectives of this project are: (i) Identification of organic resources including the utilization of domestic sewage, bio-gas slurry and other processed organic matter including green manure, domestic garbage, aquatic macrophytes, agricultural wastes, etc., (ii) Training and demonstration of technologies to the farmers, and (iii) Publication of literature, pamphlets and manuals in this regard.

5.4 Collective Forage Research Scheme: In association with the Animal Resource Development and Veterinary Services Department, West Bengal, the Parishad initiated in July 1995 a collaborative forage research project which was funded by the World Bank through the State Forest Department. After collection of about 60 species of forage grasses and legumes, on-station trials were conducted. The programme envisaged identification and screening of shade tolerant, saline resistant, drought-resistant grasses and legumes suitable for waterlogged areas of South 24-Parganas district. Two training programmes were conducted with 15 farmers each for motivating them in forage cultivation.

5.5 Soil Testing Laboratory: Started in 1987, the laboratory is engaged in testing soil samples from crop fields, orchards, flower gardens, etc. to help the farming community with recommendations in respect of major plant nutrients. This aims at economizing fertilizer usage with increased crop productivity. The laboratory also collected samples of water used for irrigation and pisciculture. During 1996 a total of 613 samples of soil were tested for pH, Ec, organic carbon, available phosphate, available potash, etc. The status of soil and water affected by floods was determined and the results com-

municated to the farmers concerned pointing out ways and means to tackle the problems.

6. Development of Thrift and Credit Groups (Jivan Deep) and Auditing

To inculcate the habit of thrift and savings amongst the rural population, a special programme 'Jivan Deep', is being conducted since 1982. The main objective of the programme is to create a good habit of savings amongst the rural people so that they can accumulate their own capital resources and meet their needs without the help of outside sources. In certain cases, these people are also provided with liberal credit facilities in order to enable them to supplement their own accumulated savings.

7. Development of Cottage Industries and Rural Entrepreneurship

The Cottage Industries Cell of the Parishad was set up as early as in 1978 with the specific objective of promoting self-employment and economy related activities in rural areas through skill development, motivation, forward and backward linkages for financial assistance from Banks, marketing, design & development, etc. The Cell has undertaken skill development training in (i) Wood Industries and Carpentry, (ii) Servicing Radio and T.V., (iii) Repair and Servicing of Agricultural equipment, (iv) Cane and Bamboo products, (v) Tailoring, (vi) Handloom Weaving, (vii) Beekeeping and Apiary, (viii) Plastic Moulding, (ix) Lathe Operation, and (x) Food Processing and Preservation.

8. Participatory or Joint Forest Management

With the increase in the population and consequent increase in the use of forest based material, forest resources get depleted in the whole of the country, and West Bengal is the worst sufferer in this regard. Sustained efforts of the West Bengal Forest Depart-

ment to conserve forest resources and to regenerate the depleted forests helped to evolve a method of forest protection with the involvement of the local people. The local people who are primarily fringe dwellers are to unite to form a group called Forest Protection Committee (FPC) which, under the active guidance of the Forest Department, is to implement various sectoral and allied activities determined through a participatory process for the management of the natural resources keeping in mind the needs and priorities of the people. Subject to conditions laid down in a memorandum, people are given the right to usufruct. At the call of the Government to involve the NGOs in this movement, the Parishad became involved in this programme.

9. Alternative and Non-conventional Sources of Energy Programme

Renewable energy sources have become important in today's world. Apart from environmental aspect, basic energy requirements can be met by using renewable energy systems, economically and with improvements in the quality of life and productivity of people in remote, isolated and backward areas. The result was the use of fuel saving improved chullahs, bio-gas plant, solar energy and wind energy.

9.1 The Indo-US Renewable Energy Project: This project aims at installing domestic lights in 300 homes spread over 3 villages in 3 islands. Each home will have two compact fluorescent lights and one wall socket.

9.2 Aditya, the Solar Shop: Where connection to the national grid is a distant possibility, the Parishad has set up an extensive sales-cum-service network. With the approval of the Ministry of Non-conventional Energy Sources (Govt. of India) and the West Bengal Renewable Energy Development Agency, the Parishad has set up an exhibition centre in this respect at Narendrapur with the following objectives: (i) Sale of solar energy systems, (ii) Direct disbursement of subsidy

for the Government approved items, (iii) Maintenance facility, (iv) Sale of other fuel saving and non-conventional energy appliances, and (v) Permanent display on the use of solar systems and information pertaining thereto. During the year 1996, this shop sold 141 solar devices including domestic lighting system, lanterns, and cookers.

9.3 Bio-gas Extension Programme: Due to depletion of fuel source, the Parishad has been encouraging farmers to install bio-gas plants. The Central and State Governments have recognized the Parishad as a major implementing agency in this regard. The West Bengal Renewable Energy Development Agency has been utilizing the services of the Parishad for imparting training in Bio-gas technique.

10. Training-cum-Production Programme

10.1 Carpentry Unit: For the last two decades the Parishad has been conducting two training courses in carpentry, one for 12 months and the other for 6 months with 25 trainees in each of these courses. The target group is the youth who are unemployed and yet interested to learn skill oriented jobs. On completion of the course about 60 per cent of the trainees go in for self-employment. Another advanced course is organized at the training-cum-production unit for 6 months where the trainees can earn while they learn.

10.2 Beekeeping and Honey Processing: The Parishad has been conducting training programmes in Beekeeping for the last two decades in different parts of West Bengal. Both *serena* and *melifera* species of honey-bees were employed in the training-cum-production unit. During the year 1996, 22 young persons were trained and 14,000 kg of graded honey processed and marketed.

10.3 Food Processing: Assisted by the Directorate of Food Processing Industries, Government of West Bengal, the Parishad established a food processing centre and during the year 36 men and women were trained.

10.4 Animal Husbandry and Poultry Keeping: This unit, functioning almost since the inception of the Parishad, was established for improving animal resources in and around Narendrapur by imparting skills about cattle and poultry management. Because of regular and prompt transfer of technology over the last three decades, the cattle population in the area has improved significantly. Facilities for field training, artificial insemination, veterinary first aid, etc. have become the responsibility of the Parishad.

10.5 Advanced Photographic Laboratory (Photolab): This has been established by the Parishad to provide facilities for training in photography and thereby to promote self-employment. Stress is laid on the practical side of photography, both black & white and colour. The trainees are supplied with camera, films, chemicals and printing papers during the course.

11. Research and Evaluation Cell

This Cell of the Parishad started in 1980 is engaged in conducting different kinds of studies sponsored by agencies like UNESCO, UNICEF, LWS, EZE, German Agro Action, KAF, CCF, CRS, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama at Ranchi, Pallimangal, CAPART, etc. In 1966, 29 studies were made in (i) Base Line Survey, (ii) Situational Analysis, (iii) Evaluation Study, (iv) Impact Study, and (v) Feasibility Study.

12. Miscellaneous Programmes

12.1 Special Events: These included: (i) Orientation for young persons from South Asia, (ii) Field Placement of the participants of 16th Diploma Course of Commonwealth Youth Programme, (iii) Conducting a diploma course in Youth Development as a part of the Commonwealth Youth Programme, and (iv) Visits by dignitaries.

12.2 Meetings, Seminars, Workshops, etc.: Around the year the Parishad was invited to participate in a number of meetings, seminars, and workshops. □

A Special Report

A short report of the celebration on 15 January 1997 in connection with the Centenary of Swami Vivekananda's visit to Sri Lanka was reported in the April 1997 issue of Prabuddha Bharata. Some aspects which were not covered therein are presented below.

The grand Centenary celebrations were inaugurated on 12 January 1997, the date being the date of birth of Swami Vivekananda, at the Vivekananda Birth Centenary Memorial Hall of the Ramakrishna Mission, Wellawatte. The High Commissioner of India to Sri Lanka, **H.E. Shri Nareshwar Dayal**, presided over the inaugural meeting and **Revered Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj**, one of the Vice Presidents of the Ramakrishna Order, delivered the key-note address. **On this occasion a book in Tamil, entitled 'Ramakrishna Movement in Sri Lanka', was released.** The first copy of the book was presented by **Dr. Nalli Kuppuswami Chetti**, a Chennai (Madras)-based industrialist and also the Vice President of the Vivekananda Centenary Celebration Committee Chennai, to **Revered Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj**.

The Ramakrishna Mission started its activities in Sri Lanka as far back as 1924 with the management of a few schools. The Centre at Colombo started formally on 22 October 1930 in a temporary house. The foundation of the permanent building at its present site was laid on 6 March 1935. This new building was dedicated on 24 February 1936 at the very commencement of the Centenary of Sri Ramakrishna's advent. In the same year, on 26 April, its 'Jerbai Memorial Hall' was opened. The Sri Ramakrishna Birth Centenary Temple with its Prayer Hall was dedicated on 4 January 1938 (vide

Swami Gambhirananda, *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission*, 3rd revised edition, 1983, p.270). The Centre also houses the Vivekananda Birth Centenary Memorial Hall, one of the biggest auditoriums in Colombo. Some of the services rendered by the Ashrama include daily worship at the shrine, weekly and special discourses, celebrations of the birthdays of Prophets, monthly special retreats, Sunday Religious School for children, Library and Reading Room, Sale of Religious books, relief work, free monthly medical camp, and others.

A branch of the Colombo centre at Batticaloa was started in 1925. It maintains three orphanages and, besides the Ashrama's normal daily and weekly activities, conducted various welfare activities which included occasional classes at Mantivu Lepers' Asylum.

On the occasion of the Celebration of the Centenary of Swami Vivekananda's Visit to Sri Lanka, special messages of dignitaries appeared in the 14 January edition of the *Daily News* published in Sri Lanka.

In his message **Srimat Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj**, the President of the Ramakrishna Order, said:

...A hundred years ago, the whole country was eagerly waiting for the triumphant return of Swami Vivekananda after his great success in

preaching the eternal religion of the East to the West. Swamiji preached the eternal truth of Vedanta, its eternal principles of unity of existence, divinity of the human soul, harmony of all religious faiths and universal brotherhood of mankind. The principles of Vedanta do not create any barrier of caste, creed, religion, colour or nationality. They are all-embracing and suit different temperaments and cultural groups. Swamiji made these principles familiar to all people and opened a new horizon in the spiritual thought of the world. He said, 'Mankind ought to be taught that religions are but the varied expressions of THE RELIGION, which is Oneness, so that each may choose that path that suits him best.' By implementing these principles in the life of the followers of different religions, peace & forbearance, tolerance & sympathy, and universal brotherhood may be established in the world.

When the news of his arrival reached India and Sri Lanka, then known as Ceylon, the joy of the people knew no bounds. Every house, every street was decorated. A rousing welcome awaited Swamiji, the national hero. Such a grand ovation was given to Swamiji that historians feel that there is no record of any other personality receiving such a hearty welcome before. Swamiji's holy feet touched the city of Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka, from where he began his series of lectures in the East. Thus the city of Colombo has a special importance in the life and mission of the Swami.

It is therefore in the fitness of things that a magnificent bronze statue of the great monk be installed in the heart of the Colombo City. I hope this image will be a source of inspiration to the people of Sri Lanka and awaken in them the awareness of the glorious past of the East.

I am happy to know that the Government of Sri Lanka proposes to release a commemorative postal stamp on Swamiji on this august occasion. It is certainly a laudable step by the Government and I take this opportunity to thank them for this noble decision.

I wish the ceremony of installation of the statue as well as the release of the commemorative stamp a grand success.

In his message, **Revered Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj**, Vice President of the Ramakrishna Order, said:

...Swami Vivekananda preached no creed or dogma, but the profound truth discovered by the Sages of India—the inherent divinity present in every human being. And he also preached that the best form of inter-human relationship is love and service. After his lectures in Colombo, he spoke at Anuradhapuram and Jaffna and then crossed over to Ramnad, at the southern tip of India. From there, through various towns and cities of Tamil Nadu, including Madras (Chennai), and Calcutta, Lahore and Almora, his brilliant speeches conveyed the profound message of human awakening, human unity, and harmony.

...His French biographer Monsieur Romain Rolland speaks of these speeches of Vivekananda in the following words in his book, *Life of Swami Vivekananda*.

Vivekananda's words are great music, phrases in the style of Beethoven, stirring rhythms like the march of Handel choruses. I cannot touch these saying of his, scattered as they are through the pages of books at thirty years' distance, without receiving a thrill through my body like an electric shock. And what shocks, what transports must have been produced when in burning words they issued from the lips of the hero!

I convey my love, and blessings for the success of the celebrations in Colombo.

In his message the **Hon'ble President of India, Shri Shanker Dayal Sharma**, wishing the celebration a success said:

...Swami Vivekananda's call for commitment to the values of pluralism and peace is increasingly relevant as our nations and peoples strive for a better future. Let us dedicate ourselves to the great ideals that Swami Vivekananda held aloft and strive for the cause of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation for the good of all.

In his message the **Hon'ble President of Sri Lanka** said:

I am pleased to send my warm greetings to the Ramakrishna Mission on the occasion of the centenary celebrations of Swami Vivekananda's historic visit to Sri Lanka.

This special occasion presents a fine opportunity to acknowledge Swami Vivekananda's valuable message of peace and harmony and his moving appeal: "'Help and not Fight", "Assimilation and not Destruction", and "Harmony and Peace and not Dissension".' We in Sri Lanka remember the Swami as a great advocate of Hindu-Buddhist unity which strengthens the close links we have had with India.

Moreover, his thoughts on education are very relevant to us in Sri Lanka. To him education was not the amount of information that is put into the brain..., but should be a man-making, character-building assimilation of ideas. It is only then that self-reliance, strength of mind, expansion of the intellect and the development of peace and human excellence could be had. His idea that women should receive equal opportunities for education as men, is something we in Sri Lanka have accomplished to a great extent.

I understand that a statue of the Swami is being installed to mark this occasion. This is indeed timely.

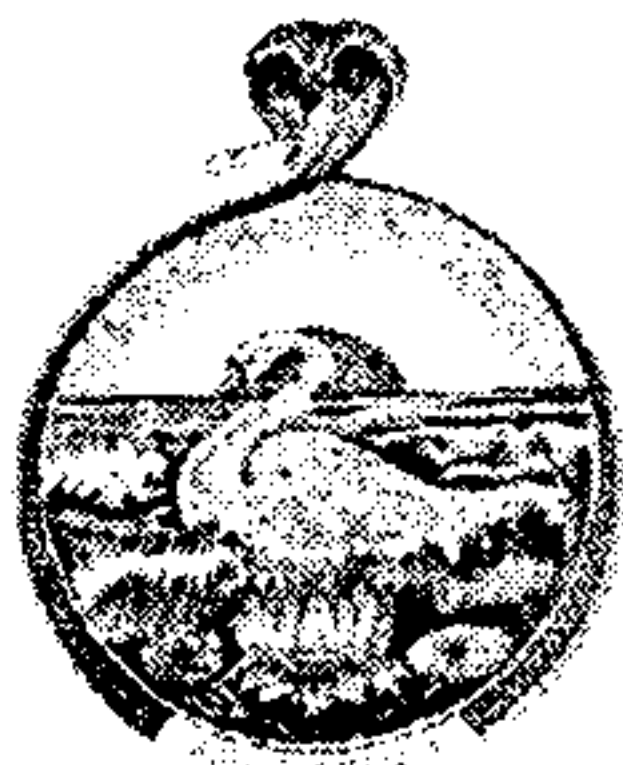
I convey my sincere good wishes for the success of the centenary celebrations.

Various organizations took part in the celebrations: (1) All Ceylon Hindu Congress, (2) Colombo Young Women's Hindu Association, (3) Hindu Council of Sri Lanka, (4) Saiva Mangaiyar Kazhagam, (5) Sri Ramakrishna Sarada Samity, (6) Vivekananda Society, and others. The celebration on the 15 January was held at the premises of the Colombo Vivekananda Society. On this occasion, a 9'6" bronze statue of Swami Vivekananda (cost Rs. 4,50,000) was unveiled by Revered Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj. Also a commemorative stamp was released by the Post and Telecommunications Minister Shri Mangala Samaraweera who deputized at the ceremony for the Hon'ble Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike.

In delivering his benedictory speech on this occasion **Revered Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj** said:

Friends, this is a great occasion. We are all gathered here today, 15 January 1997, on the centenary of Swami Vivekananda's landing in

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SWAMI VIVEKANANDA - VISIT TO SRI LANKA



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Colombo on his return from America after four years of tremendous work in England and America. From here he went to Jaffna via one or two towns on the way and, thereafter, reaching in India, did great work by awakening the whole nation to fight for freedom and urged the development of the nation and the people of India as a whole.

So when you install his statue in Colombo to commemorate the day on which he landed here, we are doing something great—not merely observing the occasion with a function as we are doing today, but signifying that this is going to bring a great blessing on this grand island of Sri Lanka where humanity has suffered a good deal. We will now recollect Swami Vivekananda's contribution: Equilibrium and synthesis are the watchwords of Swami Vivekananda's personality. This is an idea we get from Romain Rolland's *Life of Vivekananda*: 'equilibrium and synthesis'. This Island must bring about that equilibrium and synthesis that Swami Vivekananda stood for and which we are commemorating today by the unveiling of his statue in Colombo City. I am sure that great events will follow.

In his lecture in Colombo, in response to the great address of welcome received here, he referred to two great ideas: the first is the spirit of unity in diversity, and the second is the spirit of,



The 9'6" Bronze Statue of Swami Vivekananda installed in Colombo

understanding and acceptance that developed in India from the time of *R̥g-Veda*, about 4000 years ago—*Ekam sat viprā bahudhā vadanti*, Truth is one sages call It by various names. Vivekananda said that that one teaching, gathering momentum, expanded during the centuries and became the sheet-anchor of India's social, political, religious



Hon'ble Minister of Posts and Telecommunications of Sri Lanka handing over the First Day Cover to Revered Swami Ranganthanandaji Maharaj

policy and programme. The harmony between various religions, various languages and various peoples that India has manifested is a rare phenomena in history, and therefore we need that great idea to spread throughout the world today.

The second great idea of understanding and acceptance that Swamiji expressed in his address to the citizens of Colombo on 15 January 1897 is our great need. Respect every religion, and show sympathy towards every religion—this is what is essential. We have to live together on this small earth by respecting each other. Each one is free to follow his own idea of religion. This must be the sheet-anchor of our national policy. India has held to this principle for centuries. Ages ago the Great Emperor Asoka who was a Buddhist, a follower of Buddha, displayed this message in his inscriptions on rocks and pillars in the 3rd century BC. '*Samavāya eva sādhu*' was the wording he used.

In the world of religious harmony, concord is the right way. That is what we need today. That has inspired India through the ages. It welcomed the Jews, in the first century when their temple was shattered by Roman tyranny in Jerusalem.



*The Statue of Swami Vivekananda
unveiled in Colombo by
Revered Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj*

When they came to Kerala, Indians welcomed them and they lived here with great peace and joy up to the last few years when they returned to Israel. So also the first Christians. The first Parsees all came to India. India thus became a land of welcome to all persecuted religious people from all parts of the world. All that rests on that great teaching in the *R̥g-Veda*, *Ekam sad viprā bahudhā vadanti*.

We need that spirit to inspire the people in all the countries of the world. Vivekananda, and his great Master Sri Ramakrishna who lived every type of religion and found that all religions lead to the same goal, *yato math tato path* (*As many religions so many pathways to God*), came to spread this message. These great ideas are represented now by this statue of Swami Vivekananda. But the mere statue cannot deal with the problems. We have to draw inspiration from that statue. The statue points to the literature arising from the great Vivekananda. When we begin to read it, our minds change, all that is negative becomes positive. This is what we have to achieve today—positive attitude, a humanistic attitude, a respect for every human being. In everyone there is divinity present. No distinction, either of castes or of creeds or of races or of ethnic divisions can separate us. That idea has inspired the whole world today, because the world has come very close. We speak of global understanding, global uniformity, and oneness. That is the stage Swami Vivekananda proclaimed in his various lectures and discourses, not only here but also in different talks from Ramnad northwards to Lahore and Almora. All these lectures are available to us in the famous book, *Lectures from Colombo to Almora*. It is a book worth reading. We can get a new outlook, a new energy, a new enthusiasm to strive for harmony and peace in society by reading that book.

I am very happy that today we have two great functions: one is this unveiling of the statue, and the other is the release of a commemorative postal stamp by the Hon'ble Minister. These two functions indicate that Swamiji's message will reach our people so that whatever is negative we shall change into positive so that more of human

welfare, human unity, human harmony, will come to the whole nation both in Sri Lanka and India. I convey to you my thanks for inviting me to this function. I have come earlier to Sri Lanka several times since 1946. So it is not a new place for me. I have been eager to come and it is ten years since I last came here.

In his address the **Hon'ble Minister Mangala Samaraweera** said:

I am indeed greatly privileged to have been invited to participate in the centenary celebrations of Swami Vivekananda's historic visit to Sri Lanka in 1897. It is even a greater privilege to have been able to issue a stamp to commemorate this historic visit.

Swami Vivekananda was one of the finest spiritual leaders from the sub-continent of India which has produced some of the greatest sages, philosophers and religious leaders the world has ever seen. Swami Vivekananda preached the eternal truth of Vedanta, the principles of unity of existence, harmony of all religious faiths and the universal brotherhood of mankind transcending the narrow boundaries of caste, creed, religion and nationality. His philosophy of oneness opened a new horizon in spiritual thought in the world and his call for universal brotherhood was triumphantly received even by the western world when he attended the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago.

Swami Vivekananda, after his triumphant success at this forum, visited Sri Lanka, then known as Ceylon, exactly 100 years ago, this very day. A rousing welcome awaited the Swami and historians feel that there is no record of another personality receiving such a hearty welcome before. What was remarkable about the rousing welcome was that the thousands who filled the streets of Colombo to welcome this great saint were not only Hindus, many were Buddhists and some were Christians and Muslims.

During his short stay of eleven days he travelled throughout the country from Colombo to Kandi and Jaffna. His address under the Sacred Bo tree of Anuradhapuram was attended by Hin-

dus and Buddhists alike. His call for brotherhood reverberated throughout the island. Today the teachings of Swami Vivekananda are relevant to us in Sri Lanka more than ever before.

Nearly five decades of racial intolerance, bigotry and ethnocentricity have eaten into the very core of our society creating disunity, suspicion, and animosity among the communities. The very soul of our nation is at stake and it is still not too late in the day to be inspired by the teachings of Swami Vivekananda as we seek to overcome the tragedy of our otherwise beautiful country.

As a government committed to restoring racial harmony in this country and having the courage or convictions to do so, Swami Vivekananda's philosophy of oneness is an inspirational force as we strive to build a new Sri Lanka based on the ideals of peace, forbearance, tolerance & sympathy and universal brotherhood.

The greatest tribute to this great spiritual leader would be for us to unite in friendship and goodwill and love and understanding to build a new Sri Lanka where all can live in dignity and honour, where peace will reign forever. The age of Aquarius may not be far away after all.

The **President of Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, Revered Swami Gautamananda** said in his tribute that science and technology were of no use without spirituality and brotherhood. It was therefore necessary to develop oneself spiritually as preached by Swami Vivekananda.

Special messages sent by Sri Lanka's Hon'ble Prime Minister, Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike, the Hon'ble Cultural and Religious Affairs Minister, Shri Lakshman Jayakody and the Hon'ble Livestock Development and Rural Industries Minister, S. Thondaman, were also read at the meeting. The Indian High Commissioner, H.E. Shri Nareshwar Dayal and Colombo's Hon'ble Mayor, Shri K. Ganeshalingam were among the distinguished guests who were present. □

A Message from Srimat Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj

A message in Bengali from Revered Maharaj was read out by Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj at the public meeting held in Deshabandhu Park, Calcutta, on 23 February 1997. The following is a free translation.

The advent of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda in our present age is a historic event. Their lives and message are relevant not merely for the people of India, but they are pointers to the welfare of humanity as a whole. Their entire life was dedicated to the welfare of others. The lessons which Swami Vivekananda learnt sitting at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna in Dakshineswar, he established later in life on a strong foundation in the world forum. During the days of wandering through the length and breadth of India after the *mahāsamādhi* of Sri Ramakrishna, Swamiji was pained to see the poverty and pitiable state of the motherland as well as the superstition laden, distorted practice of religion. Sitting on the last bit of rock at Kanyakumari he saw before his mind's eye the glorious past of India, the decadent present and the potential future as well as the path by which India was to arise out of her present stupor. It was from here that he received the inspiration to participate in the Parliament of World Religions at Chicago.

Even at the first appearance Swamiji demonstrated his superiority. He not only preached Vedanta, but also taught how by removing the weaknesses in every religion religious harmony could be established whereby there could be lasting peace on earth. He said, "Help and not Fight," "Assimilation and not Destruction," "Harmony and Peace and not Dissension."

Swamiji saw in the West through personal contact that with material affluence there also existed spiritual poverty. As the cry in India was for food, even so in the West there was a dearth of spirituality. Western knowledge, science and technology may bring to human beings temporal happiness and comfort, but failing to utilize scientific knowledge properly, it may also cause

destruction of human civilization and even of the entire humanity. To prevent this is needed men endowed with discrimination in sufficient numbers, through whom scientific knowledge may be utilized in a proper and beneficent manner. It is only true religion that can give to man that awareness. So Swamiji wanted to utilize the liberal religious ideas of the East for the welfare of the West. He wanted a combination of the wealth of the Eastern religions with the secular education of the West. India was to give to the West out of her bounty of spiritual treasures, and take from the West her secular treasures, technical know-how and scientific knowledge. This harmony would not only benefit both India and the West, but it would also bring into existence a new civilization, a new culture, a new spirituality—which would foster peace and welfare on earth. Sri Ramakrishna had by transmitting to Narendranath all his spiritual powers kindled Swamiji's latent powers. What took place at the World Parliament was the first expression of this.

Swamiji preached India's eternal message of peace holding high India's glory and rich tradition. This unimaginable success of Swamiji brought vigour into the minds of Indians. To the sleeping leviathan it brought renewed hope; it revealed a new path to self expression. Swamiji's return to India enhanced this inspiration, and the nation, casting aside all inertia, became awake to the task of building a new India. Truly, his grand success at the Parliament of Religions at Chicago and his spirited preaching in America and Europe, brought a sense of pride and self-confidence resulting in the beginning of a real national awakening, and the slave nation began to see dreams of freedom. From Colombo via South India Swamiji reached Calcutta on the 19 Febru-

ary 1897. In his speeches delivered during this period, Swamiji with a view to awakening Indians and establishing them in their own glory, decried in fiery language our religious superstitions and weaknesses. It was the mesh of superstition all around that led to our downfall. It is never possible to achieve progress by isolating oneself from others through hatred. Swamiji believed in give and take, in exchange of ideas and in cooperation between different societies. Without this it will not be possible for any one to survive or progress. He stressed 'the principle that nations and individuals alike subsist and prosper by a system of give and take.' We theorize much but when it comes to putting something into practice we are nowhere; rather we strive to achieve perfection by imitating others. Swamiji had in strong language criticized this imitation of others.

That our religion is liberal, there is no doubt; but in fact, our social life is one of extreme selfishness. Casteism and treading on the weak by the powerful have for long polluted the national life. Sri Ramakrishna had spoken of 'Service of God in man'. Swamiji made practical this teaching of Sri Ramakrishna by establishing the Ramakrishna Mission. Swamiji's interpretation of spirituality opens up new vistas. He affirmed that 'the nation lives in the cottage'. During his wandering days, coming into contact with the high and the low, with the educated and the uneducated, of all classes and castes, he had gained this experience. To awaken India it was necessary to first root out poverty, ignorance, wrong educational methods, and superstition in religion. It was also necessary, through good education, to bring vigour, courage and self-confidence in the hearts of those, who have kept alive the nation through their toils bearing silently for ages neglect and tyranny, to enable them to stand on their own feet. Swamiji knew that upon their raising rested the total development of India.

Though today, after a hundred years since Swamiji returned to India, we have advanced in different areas, yet in many fields we are not self-dependent. Even now ignorance and wrong education vitiate the society. Even today commu-

nal disturbances, bloodshed, jealousy and disintegration bring terror to our minds. Therefore, it is necessary to remember the words of Swamiji so that peace may be ushered in on this earth filled with jealousy. His exemplary life alone will give unto mankind the real path to freedom. The weakness and blemishes in us have to be eradicated and along with it we certainly have to imbibe what is good in other civilizations. Out of this harmonizing alone will be possible the progress of the nation and the remaking of a glorious India.

Swamiji had high hopes on the youth of Calcutta and believed that only through disciplined, firm, strong, and highly intelligent youth the reawakening of our motherland would be possible. A hundred years ago in response to the address of welcome in Calcutta he said, 'Young men of Calcutta! ... Fire and enthusiasm must be in our blood.... It is fear that is the great cause of misery in the world. It is fear that is the greatest of all superstitions.... it is fearlessness that brings heaven even in a moment. Therefore, "Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached."'

He believed that from Calcutta will come thousands of fearless youth who will spread the immortal message of India all over the world so that India will once more occupy a coveted seat in the comity of nations. In a divine vision Swamiji foresaw: 'India will be raised, not with the power of the flesh, but with the power of the spirit; not with the flag of destruction, but with the flag of peace and love...'

May Swamiji's blessings be on all, may he fill our minds with strength and courage so that we can build a glorious India by putting into practice the directions set forth by him.

I am very happy to hear that a public meeting has been arranged at the Deshabandhu Park, Calcutta, on the occasion of the centenary of Swami Vivekananda's return to Calcutta. That this meeting may be a total success, is my prayer. I believe that the people of this country, especially the youth, will get inspiration from this meeting on hearing the life and message of Swamiji. □

The Power of Imagination

DR. VIJAY KUMAR MURTY

Dr. Murty, Professor of Mathematics at the University of Toronto, in this article, gives a myriad of ideas relating to the power of imagination in our everyday life. 'Imagination,' the author says, 'is the ability to make meaningful images and, more importantly, to extrapolate from existing ones.' Making a pertinent observation that 'the way we understand the world, ...each other, and ...God, depends on the concepts or paradigms that we carry with us, the way we imagine things to be,' the author brings out the role of imagination in (1) the creative process, say, of an artist, a sculptor, or a scientist, and, (2) the transformation of a human being, an art in itself and the essence of religion. Images vividly portraying spiritual ideas can be used to derive transformational benefits if we ruminate over them and internalize them through the process of meditation, says the author.

Introduction

Imagination is not a strange or unfamiliar word to us. It is something we use often and in a variety of situations. It is a technique for bridging the gap between where we are and where we want to be. Athletes and artists use it to envision their performance as they would like it to be. Scientists use it to pursue ideas beyond the ken of reason and evidence. And spiritual aspirants use it to transform their very being.

Image and Imagination

The root of the word 'imagination' is 'image' and this relates to sight or vision. Amongst the senses, sight holds a dominant position. As we move along the evolutionary ladder towards the human being, we find the visual apparatus gradually becoming more sophisticated. For example, to develop stereoscopic vision, the eyes had to move to the front of the face and the nose

had to shrink. A different evolutionary line led to the squirrel that had a nose like a snout and the eyes set on either side. Also, along the ladder one finds the development of colour recognition. But beyond all of these developments, in human beings there is the additional ability to discern fine detail.

This last development is especially important for the subject of this article. Though one might imagine this to be a consequence of further refinement of the visual apparatus, a new interpretive element was introduced. To understand this, we have to discuss briefly how the eyes work. How is an image formed? Scientists of the post-Industrial Revolution described the eye as a camera. Our eye has a lens, and light from an object gets focussed through it and creates an image that is upside down. But more recent studies have completely changed this view.

The mechanism of sight is, it would seem, rather more sophisticated. The eye contains more than a million or so rods and cones—tiny detectors of light. When light strikes these rods and cones, they convey to the brain only the information, 'I have been struck by a photon of light.' This barrage of information reaches the brain, which is then

* This article is based on a talk given on 5 March 1995 at the Vivekananda Vedanta Society, Chicago. The author is thankful to Swami Chidananda for the invitation to speak and to Thomas Loree for some helpful stylistic suggestions.

expected to assemble a meaningful image. So this process more closely resembles what takes place in a television or computer screen than in a camera. But the point being made here is that in addition the eye is 'wired', so to speak, to look for some other information as well which the brain needs. The eye looks for boundaries and straight edges, among other things. The brain uses this to 'enhance' the coarse picture it has produced, for example to straighten out the wavy edges of a door. There is therefore an interpretative factor built into the process of vision itself. The subjective nature of perception, therefore, has a physiological basis.

Vision plays such an important role in the way we acquire and process knowledge. The expression 'A picture is worth a thousand words' shows how much information can be conveyed by one visual image. But the word 'vision' has grown in meaning beyond that of physical sight. We speak of a person with vision as one who is able to see through time or in some other abstract domain. The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* speaks of the heroic person who, desiring the changeless, turned his vision inward and perceived the inner Being: *Kaścīd dhīraḥ pratyagātmānam aikṣat āvṛtta cakṣuḥ amṛtatvam icchan*.¹ Here, the word 'vision' does not refer to seeing in the usual sense, but in some more abstract sense.

Thus, image and vision lead to imagination and visionary. Starting from something physical, we have suddenly stepped into a world with infinite possibilities that transcends and leaves far behind the more mundane world of the limited and sensate.

Imagination and

the Subjective Nature of Perception

Imagination is the ability to make meaningful images and, more importantly,

to extrapolate from existing ones. We seem to be born with this ability, though it may be less developed or more developed in any one individual. It is an essential component in our freedom to choose one of several alternatives in action.

As we grow up, our imagination also develops, and it is largely affected by our mental conditioning and identifications. It is also intertwined with the subjective nature of perception, and the two together have enormous consequences for our interpersonal relationships and the way we conduct our lives. We shall give several examples of this.

Sometimes our imagination can 'create facts'. For example, people who hear ghost stories may find their minds projecting ghosts and ghostly behaviour into their environment, and they may even find evidence to support this. Thus, they have an uneasy feeling as soon as they are alone. Perhaps, those of us who hear or read or watch the daily news are apprehensive about the motives of every stranger we see on the road.

Sometimes our imagination blinds us to some key facts. There is the story of a plane carrying the President of the United States, the Chairman of the Communist Party of China, the President of France, a priest and a hippie. The pilot realized that the plane was in danger and that it would crash. He therefore advised the five passengers to save themselves but warned them that there were only four parachutes. The passengers looked at each other. Suddenly, the President of the United States jumped to his feet and declared, 'I am the leader of the free world; I cannot afford to die!' Saying so, he picked up a parachute and jumped out of the plane. Next, the Chairman of China declared, 'I am the leader of the Communist world and I cannot afford to die!' He also picked up a parachute and jumped to safety. The President of France then jumped to his feet and declared, 'I am the leader of the

1. *Eight Upaniṣads*, tr. Swami Gambhirananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1986), vol. 1, *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, śloka II.i.1.

intellectual world; I cannot afford to die!', and reaching hurriedly for a parachute jumped out of the plane. The priest and the hippie now looked at each other and the Father said, 'It is alright son, I am not afraid to die, for the Lord will take care of me. Take the remaining parachute and save yourself.' To this, the hippie replied, 'Cool it Pop! We can both go. The leader of the intellectual world took my knapsack!'

Imagination can also help us to remember facts. American author and lecturer Dale Carnegie describes a curious but effective memory system using imagination. Suppose you were listening to a lecture and you wanted to remember the points in a specific order, 1, 2, 3 and so on. He would advise you to replace each numeral with a word and corresponding picture such as 1—sun, 2—zoo, 3—tree, and so on. Then, encapsulate the first point you want to remember in a picture and superimpose it on the 'sun', the second in a 'zoo' scene, the third in a 'tree' and so on. By using your imagination, you can construct images that are striking and therefore easy to remember.²

Sometimes our imagination causes us to 'paint another's words in a completely unintended colour', as in the following story which I heard from Swami Adiswarananda. Once a man was driving a truck load of penguins to be delivered to the zoo. On the way, he experienced mechanical difficulties and while he was attempting to correct them, the penguins were getting restless and some were coming out of the truck and moving around. Another truck which was empty was passing by and realizing that this man was in difficulty, the driver stopped and enquired if he could render any assistance. 'I was taking these penguins to the zoo. If you could take them for me, it would really be helpful.' The second man said, 'Sure, no

problem', and they loaded the penguins into his truck and he went off. The first man eventually got his truck to a garage and got it repaired. The next day, he stopped at a diner and was surprised to see the other man was also there and so were all the penguins and they were having a snack! The first man got very annoyed since he had entrusted the other man with his responsibility. He went up to him and asked, 'Didn't I ask you to take these penguins to the zoo?' The second man, feeling a little puzzled by his annoyance, replied innocently, 'I did take them to the zoo. And tonight I will take them to the opera, and tomorrow we will go to the museum.' This is an example of imagination giving an unintended meaning!

Our imagination can also change the dimension of words, that is, magnify out of proportion the significance of words. It can make mountains out of mole hills. We are so affected by the words of others, and a mild rebuke may become a mental storm: '...a little stone hurts us, a little anger from a little Jack wounds us—any fool on the street makes "these gods" miserable!'³

Imagination can also be communicable. An essential part of art is the communication of imagination. We may think that the word 'imagination' has a connotation of the unreal, but, in fact, it is imagination that helps us to call into question the nature of reality. Imagination offers us a possibility of transcending conventional wisdom, of overcoming artificial limitations that we have allowed to be placed on our understanding, and of approaching the Truth. Once during a class at Belur Math, Swami Vivekananda said:

Here is the unveiled presence of Brahman. Fie upon those who, disregarding It, set their mind on other things! Ah!

2. See M. Ram Murty, 'Vivekananda and the Art of Memory', *Prabuddha Bharata*, vol. 100 (1995), pp. 837–44.

3. 'Work and Its Secret', *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), vol. 2, p. 8. [Hereafter *Complete Works*.]

here is Brahman as palpable as a fruit in one's palm. Don't you see? Here!⁴

And he said it with such emphasis that all present were transfixed as if they were actually experiencing a transcendental presence. It took some minutes before people returned to their normal awareness. Here is an example of how a higher vision can be communicated.

Our conscience can express itself through the faculty of imagination. Once, someone stole a pumpkin from a garden by carrying it away on his shoulder. The owner called together all those who worked there and demanded to know who did it. The guilty man began to dust off his shoulders and stammer, 'Why are you looking at me?' His conscience made him imagine that there was some incriminating evidence on his shoulders when, in fact, there was none, and he felt the owner was looking at him when, in fact, he was not.

In his book *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*,⁵ Sigmund Freud gives many examples of how conscience works through the imagination and through suggestion. The great dramatists have also understood this psychological fact. Shakespeare's murderous king Claudius, in the play *Hamlet*, wonders whether there is rain enough in the heavens to wash his blood-stained hand as white as snow, when in fact the stain is in his mind.

All of these are examples of the principle that what we perceive is but a reflection of ourselves. We see the world not as *it* is, but as *we* are. This is the subjective nature of perception. Vivekananda gives the following example:

Suppose there is a baby here, and you place a bag of gold on the table. Suppose a robber comes and takes the gold away.

To the baby it is all the same; because there is no robber inside, there is no robber outside. To sinners and vile men, there is vileness outside, but not to good men. So the wicked see this universe as a hell, and the partially good see it as heaven, while the perfect beings realize it as God Himself.⁶

The principle that what we see outside is but a reflection of what is inside, has many important consequences. If we see good qualities such as holiness, unselfishness, purity in someone, then rest assured that those qualities must be within us also, possibly in seed form, for otherwise we would not have been able to perceive them in others. This is therefore very encouraging. I remember a talk that Swami Shraddhananda gave in Toronto a few years ago, and his opening line was, 'You are all holy people. Swamis need the holy company of devotees as much as devotees need the holy company of sadhus.'

Now we understand the advice of Sri Sarada Devi about not finding fault with others. Some wonder if this teaching would not constitute naiveté or ignorance on our part. It is important to understand it because it refers to a situation that we face many times in life. Not finding fault does not mean being blind to what is going on in front of us; rather it means refraining from the tendency to label a person by his actions. Labelling is unwise for several reasons, the chief one being that we may be completely wrong. Secondly, the human being is a dynamic and changing entity. A person may have committed a mistake but that may not be his nature and it is unfair to condemn him for that one action. Thirdly, even if we are right and it is his nature, what will be gained by labelling a person? Whom does it help?

Rather, the Holy Mother says that we

4. *Complete Works*, vol. 7, p. 234.

5. New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1989.

6. 'The Real and the Apparent Man', *Complete Works*, vol. 2, p. 279.

only injure ourselves because we bring to the forefront of our awareness our own fault and thereby emphasize it. She advises us instead to try and see the good qualities of people because that will bring out *our* good qualities. Try to remember even one good quality of that person. By doing this we develop respect for the person and we will be in a much better position to render assistance if it is needed.

It is impossible to interact properly with someone whom we do not respect. When we respect a person, we are also able to appreciate, or even understand, that person's ideals and motivation. Vivekananda says:

In our dealings with our fellow-beings we constantly labour under this mistake, and I am of opinion that the vast majority of our quarrels with one another arise simply from this one cause that we are always trying to judge others' gods by our own, others' ideals by our ideals, and others' motives by our motives. Under certain circumstances I might do a certain thing, and when I see another person taking the same course I think he has also the same motive actuating him, little dreaming that although the effect may be the same, yet many other causes may produce the same thing.⁷

And by developing respect for others, we develop also self-respect and faith in ourselves. The importance of this has been emphasized by many teachers. Vivekananda says:

The ideal of faith in ourselves is of the greatest help to us. If faith in ourselves had been more extensively taught and practised, I am sure a very large portion of the evils and miseries that we have

would have vanished.⁸

Sri Ramakrishna said:

Bondage is of the mind, and freedom is also of the mind. A man is free if he constantly thinks: 'I am a free soul. How can I be bound, whether I live in the world or the forest? I am a child of God, the King of Kings. Who can bind me?' ...The wretch who constantly says, 'I am bound', 'I am bound' only succeeds in being bound. He who says day and night, 'I am a sinner, I am a sinner', verily becomes a sinner.⁹

The Role of Paradigms

We see now that the way we understand the world, the way we understand each other, and the way we understand or interpret God depends on the concepts or paradigms that we carry with us, the way we *imagine* things to be.

Often we want to change the way things are and make vigorous efforts in this direction, and yet we find these efforts fall short of the goal. The problem is usually that we have not pinpointed the difficulty and so we end up addressing the wrong issue.

For example, most of us want to get along, to avoid conflict, and so we may work on our attitude or behaviour towards others. We may try to be 'nice', on our best behaviour, friendly and cooperative. And still we may fail to produce the right effect. The reason may be an underlying negative paradigm, such as 'this person is lazy' or 'that person does not care' or 'these people are untrustworthy'. With this in mind, no amount of trying to be 'nice' will produce much effect. If we believe we communicate

7. 'Maya and the Evolution of the Conception of God', *Complete Works*, vol. 2, p. 106.

8. 'Practical Vedanta', *Complete Works*, vol. 2, p. 301.

9. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1985), p. 138. [Hereafter *Gospel*.]

only through our words and actions, then we are labouring under a misapprehension. What we *are* speaks more loudly than what we say or do.

Stephen Covey, author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*¹⁰ gives the following example. Suppose you are trying to reach a specific location in central Chicago. You are given a map, but unknown to you, it is in fact a map of Detroit. In a very short time, you will be quite lost. At that point, you may try to work on your attitude—tell yourself to be calm and optimistic about reaching your destination, or you could work on your behaviour: try harder, be more diligent—, but you would still be lost. The problem here is not your attitude or behaviour. The problem is that you have the wrong map. To try to change our attitude and behaviour does very little good in the long run if we fail to examine the basic assumptions, the basic paradigms, from which these attitudes and behaviour flow.

On the other hand, once we have the right paradigm, our attitude and behaviour can, and will make a big difference. If we want to make a difference in any situation, we must be introspective and examine our paradigms, our mental maps, and see if they are consistent with our ideals, with what we stand for, or what we want to stand for.

This process is what Swami Vivekananda called 'man-making'. This oft-repeated phrase does not mean building up one's muscles or physical strength. Rather, it refers to the building up of the inner being so that the 'mental maps' are consistent with one's 'ideals'. He says:

The ideal of all education, all training, should be this man-making. But, instead of that, we are always trying to polish up the outside. What use in polishing up the outside when there is no inside? The end and aim of all training is to make the man

grow. The man who influences, who throws his magic, as it were, upon his fellow-beings, is a dynamo of power, and when that man is ready, he can do anything and everything he likes; that personality put upon anything will make it work.¹¹

Next we come to the role of imagination in the creative process. The artist and sculptor Michelangelo said he could imagine the finished sculpture in the block of stone. Holding fast to that vision, he would then remove all that was not part of the figure until the completed figure stood revealed. Thus, he connected two apparently disconnected things: the finished image and the stone. And if he were to explain to someone not similarly tuned that this slab of marble 'contains' the figure of David, they would simply not understand, and they might even ridicule him.

All imagination is of this nature: it is the discovery of similarities where apparently there were none. In the words of Jacob Bronowski:

The act of imagination is the opening of the system so that it shows new connections.... All those who imagine, take parts of the universe which have not been connected hitherto and enlarge the total connectivity of the universe by showing them to be connected.¹²

Everyone is familiar with the story of how Newton began to think about gravitation. The fact that there is some attractive force in the earth is obvious even to a baby. The apple falling on his head itself was therefore *not* the catalytic agent that nudged Newton

10. Simon and Schuster, 1989.

11. 'The Powers of the Mind', *Complete Works*, vol. 2, p. 15.

12. *The Origin of Knowledge and Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), pp. 109–10.

to think that there was a describable law behind this force. Rather, it was what he saw when he lifted his head to see where the apple fell from. In the sky, he saw the moon and the question that arose in his mind was, 'Why does the moon not fall down like the apple?' This was a leap of the imagination to relate the apple to the moon.

Let me tell you another story of trying to find new connections. Ptolmey was trying to understand the movements of the planets at a time when it was felt that the earth was the centre of the solar system. But the Greek ideas of natural beauty and the pre-eminence of geometry led him to believe that the orbits could be described in terms of the Platonic solids. Now this was an attempt to find a connection between what were believed to be fundamental and universal geometric constructs with the observed facts of nature. But it did not work and we know now that it was fundamentally flawed because of the geocentric nature of the model.

Nevertheless, the freedom to make what normally would be called an error is crucial to the imaginative and creative process. Swami Sarvagatananda once told me that his definition of intelligence is 'the freedom to make a mistake'. And indeed, it is true. Swami Vivekananda says something similar:

Let us think something new, even if it be wrong. It is better to do that.... We become wiser through failures.¹³

It is in the very nature of looking for similarities that most of the time the likeness is not there. Nevertheless, we make the search. Moreover, our experience suggests that even when an error is discovered, we cannot say emphatically that this point of view that led to it is to be wholly discarded.

One of the great impediments to creativity is the restraining voice of knowledge

and reason. We circumscribe our circle of possibilities when we allow these two to dominate us. Prematurely invoked, the voice of knowledge may try to tell us why our idea could not possibly work, and thus squelch our enthusiasm.

Both knowledge and reason have a role, a very important role, to play in the creative process. If imagination gives the concept, knowledge must go to work to produce the blueprints for actuating the concept. But there is a stage in the creative process when we must give ourselves the freedom to dream. You know how Einstein would carry out his thought experiments while travelling on the streetcar from his home to his work at the patent office. He would imagine what would happen if this car were to travel at the speed of light or even at half the speed of light. What would one see? What would the clock appear as? What would the people look like, and so on. He also imagined himself riding on a beam of light and explored the world he would see.

Imagination also plays an important part in mathematics. Harish-Chandra, who until his death in 1983 was Professor of Mathematics at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, once spoke about the role of imagination in the following words:

I have often pondered over the roles of knowledge or experience, on the one hand, and imagination or intuition, on the other, in the process of discovery. I believe that there is a certain fundamental conflict between the two, and knowledge, by advocating caution, tends to inhibit the flight of imagination. Therefore, a certain naiveté, unburdened by conventional wisdom, can sometimes be a positive asset.¹⁴

So intelligence, imagination and crea-

13. *Complete Works*, vol. 4, p. 126.

14. Quoted in R. Langlands, 'Harish-Chandra', *Bibliographical Memoirs of Fellows of the Royal Society*, 31 (1985), p. 206.

tivity are all tied up with this freedom to experiment, to make a mistake and continue to search.

Imagination and Transformation

Imagination in the hands of creative genius has produced wonderful works of art. But there is an even more wondrous work of art already here: the human being. Mahatma Gandhi spoke of the human being as both a sculptor and the sculpture. By holding on to a high ideal, the whole being can be sculpted into its image. Imagination thus has the power to transform the human being. And this transformation is the essence of religion. Vivekananda says:

Religion is...the whole soul becoming changed into what it believes.¹⁵

In the Ramayana, we find the story of the great Sabari, who as a young girl living in the forest hears about the coming of Rama, how day after day she imagines how she will talk to him and feed him and serve him when he comes. Her whole life is spent in this way with that miraculous faith, until one day in her old age, and after she had already gone blind, Rama does indeed come to her ashrama. But her lifelong imagination had by that time already transformed her into a saint.

Brother Lawrence practised the constant presence of God. Mahendranath Gupta, or M., meditated on Sri Ramakrishna and relived every scene of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* very many times. Through meditation and imagination, even *we* can have the company of the greatest thinkers, artists, poets, scientists and sages. We can establish with them a personal relationship of student and teacher. This imagination can be greatly aided by referring to their writings and teachings.

In discussing creativity, we said that sometimes one has to put aside knowledge and reason in order to allow imagination to flourish. In transformation, two other factors are also to be taken note of. As we said, some of our imaginings may need altering because they are exerting a negative influence on us. In this case, we can take the help of knowledge and reason to break or weaken that imagining. Or, we may invoke a higher or more powerful imagination to eclipse this one. Both are useful tools in the process of transformation.

The use of imagination as a tool in transformation has been exhibited at an extraordinary level in the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. He obviously knew the efficacy of imagination and used it extensively. In Vivekananda's words,

There are certain things which we can never know, because they are much higher than the highest vibrations of knowledge.¹⁶

Thus Sri Ramakrishna used images and imagination to appeal directly to a level of understanding beyond knowledge. As one reads the pages of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, one is struck by the number of powerful images that leap out of the page, as it were. For example, in his second meeting with M., which occupies but a few pages in the *Gospel*, the Master uses no fewer than thirteen vivid images to make his point on spiritual practice and the realization of God. It may be a fruitful exercise to reread the *Gospel* paying particular attention to how the Master uses images in his teachings.

I will mention just two of these images.¹⁷ One is that of the salt doll that went to measure the depth of the ocean. But no sooner had it entered the ocean than it

15. 'The Ideal of a Universal Religion', *Complete Works*, vol. 2, p. 396.

16. 'On Jnana Yoga', *Complete Works*, vol. 5, p. 274.

17. *Gospel*, pp. 102-03.

melted in it. Another is the ambitious ant that, finding a heap of sugar, drags away one particle with great difficulty, all the time thinking that it will come back to take away the whole heap. How cogent and effective these images are! They convey to us what volumes of explanation about the infinite and the ineffable nature of the supreme reality would not have succeeded in doing!

Now, to derive the benefit of transformation from such images, it is necessary to ruminate over them, to internalise them, through the process of meditation. Meditation itself is an exercise of imagination. It is the attempt to transform oneself in the light of a higher ideal. This higher ideal has to be projected onto our awareness with the help of familiar and suggestive images.

We have seen that there are many such images in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and the scriptures of the world give us many other images. In the Raja Yoga aphorisms, Patanjali says:

[One may meditate] on the Effulgent Light which is beyond all sorrow.... Or...on the heart that has given up all attachment to sense objects.¹⁸

To this Vivekananda adds,

Take some holy person, some great person whom you revere, some saint whom you know to be perfectly non-attached and think of his heart. That heart has become non-attached and meditate on that heart; it will calm the mind.¹⁹

Swami Vivekananda writes:

Some imaginations help to break the bondage of the rest. The whole universe is imagination, but one set of imagina-

tions will cure another set. Those that tell us that there is sin and sorrow and death in the world are terrible. But the other set—thou art holy, there is God, there is no pain—these are good, and help to break the bondage of the others. The highest imagination that can break all the links of the chain is that of the Personal God.²⁰

One question that may arise in this regard is whether we are fooling ourselves by this imagination. Are we just exercising wishful thinking? This leads also to the question of what is real. There are people who can walk on red hot coals without being burnt. On the other hand, there are natural laws, and they do operate. If we jump off the cliff, can imagination prevent our fall? I for one am not tempted to test it out. However, the philosophy behind this is that only that which we absolutely believe to be true can affect us. There are innumerable instances in the scriptures of the world of the power of belief in determining what is real. In the Gospel according to St. Matthew it is said:

And all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.... If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.²¹

When Christ cured the blind and the lepers, he said that if you believe that you are cured, so shall you be. 'Thy faith has made thee whole.'²² We have to remember that we do not see things as they are but as we think they are. Our concept of what is real and what is unreal is largely a matter of

18. 'Patanjali Yoga Aphorisms', *Complete Works*, vol. 1, p. 227.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 227.

20. 'On Bhakti Yoga', *Complete Works*, vol. 5, p. 266.

21. Matthew, 21:22, 17:20.

22. Luke, 8:48.

our mental conditioning.

What we call our reason is also largely a matter of conditioning because it is based on certain assumptions. The power of imagination is that it can cut through these assumptions and explore new possibilities. Swami Vivekananda would certainly have encouraged us to explore those possibilities. For example, in a letter to his brother disciples, Vivekananda writes about the power of imagination in maintaining good health:

Now I tell you a curious fact. Whenever anyone of you is sick, let him himself or anyone of you visualize him in your mind, and mentally say and strongly imagine that he is all right. That will cure him quickly. You can do it even without his knowledge, and even with thousands of miles between you. Remember it and do not be ill any more.²³

In another letter dated just a few months later, he wrote:

Who says you are ill—what is disease to you? Brush it aside! ...Thou art Energy, impart energy unto me. Thou art Strength, impart strength unto me. Thou art Spirituality, impart spirituality unto me. Thou art Fortitude, impart fortitude unto me!... Repeat to yourself that such and such are Atman, that they are infinite, and how can they have any disease? Repeat this an hour or so, on a few successive days, and all disease and trouble will vanish into nought.²⁴

In a lecture on 'Thought, Imagination and Meditation', he said:

The same faculty that we employ in

dreams and thoughts, namely, imagination, will also be the means by which we arrive at Truth. When the imagination is very powerful, the object becomes visualized. Therefore, by it we can bring our bodies to any state of health or disease.... There is only one power to cure the body, and that is in every man. Medicine only rouses this power. Disease is only the manifest struggle of that power to throw off the poison which has entered the body. Although the power to overthrow poison may be roused by medicine, it may be more permanently roused by the force of thought.²⁵

Finally, he adds as general advice:

Stamp out the negative spirit as if it were a pestilence, and it will conduce to your welfare in every way. No negative, all positive, affirmative. *I am*, *God is*, everything is in me. *I will* manifest health, purity, knowledge, whatever I want.²⁶

Thus imagination frees our creative power and allows us to formulate new paradigms for our own existence and nature, for that of the world and for that of our concept of God.

Now if our paradigms are compared to maps, what is the territory they are mapping? In other words, what is the underlying reality? Vedanta says clearly and unequivocally that that is the spiritual being, Brahman, or less accurately, God. The *Īśa Upaniṣad* begins with the amazing statement: 'Whatever exists in this world, even in the very minutest portion, is the Supreme Being.'²⁷

We had said that imagination is the discovery of connections between things

23. *Complete Works*, vol 5., p. 33; letter to Swami Saradananda dated 20.5.1894.

24. *Ibid.*, vol. 6, pp. 276–7; letter to brother disciples dated 25.9.1894.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 133.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 276.

27. 'All this—whatsoever moves on the

that are apparently disconnected. Thus, the grandest imagination of all is something that can unify or connect all that is. All that is—the living and the non-living, the physical and mental, the manifest and the unmanifest, all that we can conceive of and even what we cannot. So grand is this speculation that one may imagine that the heart of the universe missed a beat, as it were, when the student Śaunaka walked up to his teacher, Aṅgīras, and asked, ‘Sir, which is that thing which having been known, all this becomes known?’²⁸

And Swami Vivekananda explains:

What existed was the Lord Himself. It is He who is in the child, in the wife, and in the husband; it is He who is in the good and in the bad; He is in the sin and in the sinner; He is in life and in death....The whole world is full of the Lord. Open

earth—should be covered by the Lord.’ See *Eight Upaniṣads*, tr. Swami Gambhirananda, vol. 1, *Īśa Upaniṣad*, śloka 1.

28. *Eight Upaniṣads*, tr. Swami Gambhirananda, vol. 2, *Muṇḍaka-Upaniṣad*, I.i.3.

your eyes and see Him. This is what Vedānta teaches. Give up the world which you have conjectured, because your conjecture was based upon a very partial experience, upon very poor reasoning, and upon your own weakness.²⁹

In his own words,

If we discover that there is one unity running through all these developments, spiritual, moral, and social, we shall find that religion, in the fullest sense of the word, must come into society, and into our everyday life. In the light of Vedānta you will understand that all sciences are but manifestations of religion, and so is everything that exists in this world.³⁰

The power of imagination is that it can bring us to this point. □

29. ‘God in Everything’, *Complete Works*, vol. 2, pp. 146–7.

30. ‘Maya and the Evolution of the Concept of God’, *Complete Works*, vol. 2, pp. 115–16.

LET GO AND LET GOD

As children bring their broken toys
with tears for us to mend,
I brought my broken dreams to God,
because He was my friend.
But then, instead of leaving Him
in peace to work alone,
I hung around and tried to help
with ways that were my own.
At last I snatched them back and cried
‘How can You be so slow?’
‘My child,’ He said, ‘What could I do?
You never did let go.’

—Unknown

Quoted in the book, *Tough Times Never Last, Tough People Do* by Robert M Schuller. This piece was sent to us by Sri Gautam Banerji of West Bengal.

The Quest

V. DHURANDHAR

Deeply in love with the splendour of the Self,
I turned my back on cakes and ale,
The lure of power and pleasure and pelf,
To follow an ancient trail
Blazed by seers, though fraught with travail.
Navigating the razor's edge
To find myself at the thin end of the wedge,
And courting not the way of ease but of strife,
Maybe I made a mishmash of my life—
From the blinkered view
Of the worldly-wise—
insight is given to but a few.

Determined not to come back again
Knowing all earthly joy and pain
Is of the stuff of April sun and rain
And certain that Love will never be in vain
I wait for grace like lightning flash
To sweep aside the world mirage
So I can break out of the dark mindscape,
From its clouds and shadows escape
And union with the Beloved, the moment of filling
In the floodlight of the great awakening
Crowns my lifelong striving. □

* The author of Madras is an occasional contributor to *Prabuddha Bharata*.

A Family That Valued God

P. SHNEIDRE

With the exception of Rama and Bud-dha, every divine incarnation began his earthly life in poverty and hardship. Krishna was born in prison and spent his childhood exiled from his family; Bhagavan Isha, or Jesus, was born in a stable with only a manger for a bed; Shankara was born the son of a poor widow; and both Chaitanya and Mohammed were from the poorer classes. But it can be seen that in these families, even in the midst of material need, an atmosphere of contentment prevailed. The austerity of daily life seems to have been offset by charity and kindness, and in every case the parents were known for their renunciation and purity.

There is a subtle connection between their childhood poverty and adult lives of the Incarnations. Had they not known and sympathized with the poor, oppressed and miserable from their early years, could they ever have wiped away the tears of such people and brought them comfort? But the real connection lies even deeper, for bringing comfort is not the ultimate goal of the incarnations. Their real purpose for coming into the world is to stop the decline of religion—a task requiring an intimate familiarity with the principles underlying religion through the ages. Through a sympathetic understanding of why it is that religion may temporarily have lost some of its appeal, they must bring out new and perfected forms of worship more suitable for a particular time and place—i.e., the time and place in which they find themselves. And it is in the huts of the lowly—not the palaces of the rich—that this intimate knowledge of religion is to be

found. The poor man, deprived of the enjoyment of worldly pleasures, still holds on to God and His mercy as his main support; even when religion is in eclipse everywhere else, a little of its truth may still shine into the poor man's hut. Perhaps this is why great souls, the world-teachers, are attracted at the time of their birth to the huts of the poor.

A Certain Brahmin Family of Moderate Means

In Bengal, not far from where the north-western part of the district of Hooghly joins those of Bankura and Medinipur, there is a triangle of three villages known collectively as Kamarpukur. They are nestled so closely that a traveller could easily mistake them for different neighbourhoods within one village; collectively, they comprise about 4 square miles. They stand at the intersection of four roads. About 20 miles north of Kamarpukur is a famous temple called Tarakeswar Mahadeva. About 12 miles further lies the town of Burdwan, from which one of the roads goes southwest, through Kamarpukur, to Puri. Many poor pilgrims and sadhus walk along this road on their way to worship Jagannath, Lord of the universe, and return the same way. People will still¹ tell you the story of how the wheels of the Jagannath car once got stuck in the ruts of the muddy road and broke, and that the broken parts were miraculously eaten by a

1. *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga* was published between 1911 and 1918 in five parts and translated into English under the title *Sri Ramakrishna, The Great Master*, which forms the basis of this serial.

horde of white ants, and that the whole thing was an indication of the god's will to discontinue the car festival.

In those days, before so many of the agricultural villages of Bengal were devastated by malaria in 1867, they were completely at peace. Surrounded by extensive fields, these small villages of the Hooghly district looked like islands in a huge green sea. People tended to be strong and healthy as well as content, thanks to an indoor life and plentiful food, the soil being extremely fertile. Elsewhere in India, political upheavals were changing her destiny forever—but as sovereigns came and went, the mild and industrious rural people of the Bengal villages remained blissfully unaware of the turmoil. Home-loving and obedient, they remained immersed in their own peaceful pursuits and religious observances.

The villages were densely populated. Besides cultivating the fields, the villagers engaged in various small businesses; Kamarpukur is still famous in that part of the country for its *jilepi* and *nabat*, two kinds of sweet dessert. Even now its people make a decent living by manufacturing ebony hookah pipes to sell in Calcutta. At one time they were famous for producing yarn, dhotis, towels and other handicrafts when a few well-known Calcutta cloth merchants such as Vishnu Chapdi and others were living there. Now as then, a market is held in the village every Tuesday and Saturday to which people from surrounding villages bring articles of daily use to sell—yarn, dhotis, towels, cooking pots, pitchers and baskets, along with their produce. Numerous ceremonial festivals are still observed; to this day, Kamarpukur reverberates with songs in praise of the goddess Manasa—or with the Gajan song in praise of Shiva, depending on the time of year. Songs about Hari may continue uninterrupted for three days. Various castes, high and low—Brah-

min, Kayastha, weaver, milkman, blacksmith, potter and fisherman—, live at Kamarpukur. There are three or four water tanks, the largest being called Haldarpukur; as well as many small ponds, some with many hundred-petalled lotuses and white water lilies. In earlier days there were many brick houses and tombs in the village, some of which remain. In fact, much former prosperity is evident in the village, including many broken-down temples in various states of dilapidation and disuse as well as a scattering of deserted shrines. There are two burning-ghats, to the northwest and the northeast. To the west of one of them are common grazing ground, a public mango grove planted by a rich man in a neighbouring village, and the Amodar river.

Peace had not always prevailed; this river, long before the time of our story, was diverted to serve as a moat for a fort just southeast of Kamarpukur that protected the villagers from attack. The Mandaran fort's gateway, tower and moat exist to this day, as well as a temple to Shiva not far from it. All of this attests to the importance of this village and the road on which it is situated. The ruins of an elephant stable at one place along the road are further proof that it was built for use during wars and disturbances, not to mention the presence of the battlefield of Mogalmari nearby.

Two miles west of Kamarpukur are three villages side by side: Satbere, Narayanpur and Dere. At the time of which we speak, the three villages were parts of different estates; Ramananda Roy, landlord of Dere, lived in Satbere. Ramananda was a bitter man and an oppressive landlord, a perverse soul who delighted in taking away everything a tenant had. He was survived by no sons or daughters, a misfortune popularly believed to be the result of his bad karma, the habit of abusing his tenants.

About 150 years ago in Dere lived a certain Brahmin family of moderate means. They observed the customs of pious Hindus; they happened to worship God in the form of Ramachandra. A temple and water tank still commemorate their memory. Sri Manikram Chattopadhyay (or Chatterjee) of this family had three sons and a daughter. The oldest, Kshudiram ('Little Ram'), was probably born in 1775.

It is not known whether Kshudiram ever became proficient in any kind of profitable pursuit. But the Lord had blessed him with truthfulness, contentment, forgiveness, renunciation and other signs of a good Brahmin. He was tall and strong, with a fair complexion and pleasant looks. In Kshudiram's family, Sri Ramachandra had been worshipped for generations, and he showed a deep devotion to Him. He was in the habit of performing *sandhya*, along with his other daily routines, after which he would collect flowers for the worship of Raghuvir (Ramachandra). Not until he had finished his worship would he eat anything. He was greatly loved and respected by the villagers for this unwavering attention to religious customs. His idealism was awe-inspiring—for example, he refused to drink water if it had been touched by Brahmins who had followed the quite common practice of accepting money for giving their daughters in marriage.

Kshudiram took up the management of ancestral property on the death of his father. He performed this duty as well as possible for one remaining firmly on the path of religion. Some time previously he had married and taken up family responsibilities, but his wife had died young. When he was about 25, he married again. The new bride's name was Chandradevi—Chandra for short; she too was deeply religious, and her affectionate nature was very appealing. She had the knack of forgetting herself entirely in the joy of helping others. She was probably born in

1791 and would have been about eight years old at the time of her marriage. Her first son, Ramkumar ('Child Rama'), is said to have been born in 1805; a daughter, Katyayani, was born five years later.

It wasn't long before Kshudiram discovered how difficult it was to take care of business while trying to stay truthful and righteous. Shortly after the birth of Katyayani, his love of truth was put to a severe test. Ramananda Roy, the landlord of the village, was annoyed with one of Kshudiram and Chandradevi's neighbours and instituted a bogus lawsuit against him. Ramananda needed someone of good reputation to testify on his behalf, and he asked Kshudiram. The strictly upright Kshudiram deplored court litigation and anything associated with it, avoiding it even when he had a legitimate grievance. Ramananda's request was therefore quite distasteful to him. He well knew that he would make an enemy of his landlord if he refused to testify falsely in court, but he couldn't bring himself to appear. Inevitably, the landlord filed a false suit against him as well, won the case, and took possession of all of Kshudiram's paternal property through auction. After paying his part of the court costs, Kshudiram didn't have a square inch of land remaining to him in Derepur. All the villagers felt great sympathy for him, but not enough to help in any way—so great was their fear of the landlord.

Though all of Kshudiram's property, both inherited and acquired, had vanished like clouds in a breeze, he himself didn't change. He merely reflected on his predicament, and thought about how to escape the villain. He continued to take refuge at the feet of God while preparing to bid his hometown goodbye.

Old Friends

Kshudiram had a friend named Sukhlal Goswami in Kamarpukur. These

two men, of similar temperament, were old and intimate friends. Sukhlal, moved by Kshudiram's plight, vacated a few thatched huts on part of his own ancestral land and invited the family to come and take up permanent residence there—making a small but fertile plot of land part of the bargain. Kshudiram accepted, moving his family from Dere and regarding it all as the incomprehensible *lila* of the divine Lord. Sukhlal was delighted to be closer to Kshudiram, who was to live in Kamarpukur for the rest of his days.

Who can imagine the thoughts of Kshudiram and his wife as they arrived in Kamarpukur a few days later with their 10-year-old Ramkumar and 4-year-old Katyayani to settle in their new cottage? Kshudiram was now 39 years old. Fate had flicked away all that he owned, leaving him at the mercy of others—all because he had refused to become a pawn in a devious game. As they compared their past and present conditions, Kshudiram and his wife must have thought of the world as a dark place lit by only a few stray sparks of love and justice. But Kshudiram blamed no one for his misfortune; had he not heard from the scriptures that man reaps in his present incarnation what he has sown in the past? And hadn't his god, the immaculate Sri Ramachandra, already suffered more than anyone while making his own journey through this vale of tears? For that matter, hadn't Rama demonstrated that suffering and misery will visit all here below and are in fact the best of teachers? Only in times of misery and calamity do people realize the worthlessness of this constantly shifting world, and it should not surprise us that Kshudiram now felt unattached to it, that his profoundly religious soul was filled with an exclusive reliance upon God. He couldn't forget the unexpected, unasked-for shelter recently given to his family. He became indifferent to worldly possibilities, and once again devoted his time to serving

and worshipping the divine Lord as Raghuvir, completely surrendering himself. From this time on he lived like the Vanaprasthins of ancient times: in the world, but not of it. He maintained a little hut separate from his family's main cottage, in which he spent many hours each day practising concentration, prayer and contemplation.

Another incident at this time strengthened Kshudiram's faith in God. One day he went to another village on business and on his way back became tired, stopping to rest under a tree. A vast lonely field and a soft pure breeze quieted his troubled mind and tired body, and he felt a strong desire to lie down. Immediately, he was overcome with sleep. In a dream Rama was standing before him as a divine boy, his body the soft green colour of Durva grass. The dream-boy gestured to a place nearby, saying, 'I have been over there for so long without food or anyone to take care of me. Take me to your house—I want you to take care of me.' Kshudiram was overcome with emotion. Bowing to Rama again and again, he said, 'O Lord, I am without devotion, and very poor. To serve you adequately would be impossible in my hut—and if I didn't serve you just right, I would lose your grace. Why do you ask so much of me?' 'Don't be afraid,' said the boy Rama, 'I won't complain. Just take me with you.' Unable to control his feelings at this unexpected grace, Kshudiram burst into tears—and woke up. As the dream ended, he was struck by its strangeness and thought, 'Ah, if only such good fortune were really mine!' Suddenly he noticed the nearby rice field, recognizing it as the place he had just seen in his dream. He approached it tentatively and saw a strange sight: A snake with its hood expanded guarded a beautiful stone that seemed to be of the *salagrama* variety associated with Rama. Kshudiram ran toward it, eager to take it home with him. He found that it lay at the entrance to a snakehole. but with no

snake in sight. This convinced Kshudiram that his dream had been true, and his heart leapt with joy; he felt he had received God's command. Not caring whether the snake made an appearance or not, he shouted 'Glory to Raghuvir!' and picked up the stone. Carefully comparing its markings with those mentioned in the Hindu scriptures, he found that it was indeed a Raghuvir Sila, or salagrama. Transfixed, he returned home to perform the salagrama purification ceremony as prescribed by the scriptures. Kshudiram had already been worshipping Sri Ramachandra every day; he was also in the habit of daily invoking the presence of the goddess Sitala in a consecrated vessel of water. Now, the stone he had found was installed as the family deity and he began to worship it daily.

Kshudiram's financial difficulties continued, but he bore them as good-humouredly as possible and observed the religious injunctions as strictly as ever. On days when there was no food in the house and it troubled Chandradevi, her husband would say, 'Never mind. If Raghuvir chooses to fast, why shouldn't we join him?' Somehow, food sufficient for the day would always come.

But the family's uncertainty about food was short-lived, for their $\frac{1}{3}$ acre of land—which they called Lakshmijala after the goddess of wealth—began to produce more than enough rice for the little family's needs. Guests and strangers were fed as well. Family tradition has it that even when draught and scarcity prevailed all around, this particular plot of land prospered. Men had to be hired to plough the field and transplant the rice seedlings. Kshudiram would always insist on transplanting a few of them himself, taking Raghuvir's name, before the workers could finish the job.

In this way two or three years passed.

Kshudiram depended entirely on Raghuvir and whatever chance brought him, and his family never lacked basic food and clothing. These difficult trials, instead of discouraging him, filled him with a sense of reliance on God, and he knew a continuous flow of peace and contentment such as few ever experience. Being indrawn was now his natural state, and he occasionally had divine visions. While praying every morning and evening he would repeat the Gayatri meditation mantra with such deep devotion and concentration that his chest would redden and tears of love flow from his closed eyes. Early in the morning he would go, basket in hand, to pick flowers for the worship—and the goddess Sitala, who received his daily worship, would appear before him as an eight-year-old girl dressed in red and wearing many ornaments. She would smile and keep him company, helping him to choose flowers by bending the branches in blossom. These visions filled him with joy. The staunch faith and devotion which shone in his face kept him on a high spiritual plane. Seeing his peaceful face, the other villagers instinctively recognized his spirituality and began to venerate him with the love and devotion due to a *rishi*; whenever they saw him coming, they stopped all idle talk, stood up and greeted him respectfully. They hesitated to enter the bathing tank when they saw him there, waiting in reverence until he had finished. With complete faith, they came for his blessings in good times and bad.

* * *

Chandradevi's neighbours were so captivated by her loving and trusting nature that they began to look upon her as their own mother—after all, no one else listened to them with such sympathy in their joy and sadness. The poor knew that whenever they went to her they would be welcomed not only with food but with enough genuine affection to fill their hearts. Her door was

always open to holy men living on alms, and children could coax anything from her. Thus everyone, young and old, was always welcome at Kshudiram's cottage, which in spite of poverty always radiated peace and joy.

We have mentioned Kshudiram's sister Ramsila, and his two younger brothers Nidhiram and Kanairam. When Kshudiram lost his property in Derepur, his sister was 35 and his brothers 30 and 25 respectively. By then all three had married and set up their own homes. Ramsila had a son, Ramchand, and a daughter, Hemangini. At the time of Kshudiram's troubles Hemangini was 16 and Ramchand, who had begun to practise law, was about 21. Hemangini had been born in the house of her maternal uncles at Derepur and was quite a favourite with them; Kshudiram had treated her like a daughter and it was he who gave her away in marriage. She had four sons: Raghava, Ramratan, Hriday and Rajaram.

It is not known whether Nidhiram had any children; Kanairam had two sons, Haladhari and Kalidas. Kanairam was of a devotional and contemplative nature. Once he went to a play depicting the banishment of Rama to the forest, and was so enthralled by the performance that he took Kaikeyi's secret plotting to be real and had to be restrained from attacking the actor playing the part. It appears that when the ancestral property was lost, both Nidhiram and Kanairam settled in the village of their fathers-in-law.

Kshudiram's nephew Ramachandra had begun a successful law practice in Medinipur. He sent money every month to all three of his uncles. If Kshudiram didn't hear news of his nephew for some time, he became anxious and went to Medinipur to seek him out. We were told of a strange incident on one of these visits that serves as a good example of Kshudiram's deep devo-

tion to God.

Medinipur is about 49 miles southwest of Kamarpukur. One day Kshudiram, having heard nothing of Ramachandra and his family for some time, set out to visit them. This was probably during the month of Magh (January/February) or Phalgun, (February/March) when the vilva trees shed their leaves—making it difficult to worship Shiva until the new ones appear. For some time, Kshudiram had been experiencing this difficulty.

He left home very early and walked on steadily until he reached a village at about 10:00 am. Here he found vilva trees already in bloom, and his heart danced; all thought of proceeding to Medinipur left his mind. He bought a new basket and cloth and washed them thoroughly in a pond nearby. He filled the basket with new vilva leaves, covered it with a wet cloth, and returned home—arriving at about three in the afternoon. He immediately bathed and then, at great length, worshipped the Great God Shiva and Sitala the divine Mother, using the leaves he had gathered that morning. Not until he had finished the worship did he sit down for his meal and explain to Chandradevi why he had not gone to Medinipur after all.

After six years in Kamarpukur, Kshudiram's son Ramkumar was 16 and Katyayani 11. When Katyayani was given in marriage to a man in a nearby village, the man's younger sister was similarly betrothed to Ramkumar, who by this time had finished his study of grammar and literature in a Sanskrit school near the village and was studying *smṛiti*, the laws governing Hindu society and religion.

After another three or four years Kshudiram was considerably more prosperous than before, able now to give all of his

time to God. Ramkumar finished his study of *smriti* and applied himself to the improvement of the family's economic condition. Kshudiram's friend Sukhlal Goswami passed away at about this time.

Ramkumar's taking upon himself the responsibility of maintaining the family freed Kshudiram for other pursuits, and he yearned to go on pilgrimage. For a year, beginning probably in 1824, he toured South Indian places of pilgrimage. When, in 1826, long after the birth of her second child, Chandradevi gave birth to another son, Kshudiram named him Rameswar in memory of a stone symbol of Shiva he had brought home with him from this pilgrimage.

The next eight years brought little change in the lifestyle of the poor family of Kamarpukur, although as a result of Ramkumar's success at advising people in religious matters and performing various religious ceremonies, the family did not feel the same pinch of poverty as before. Such an expert did Ramkumar become in the performance of religious rites that he was said to have acquired a supernatural power for making them effective. His study of the scriptures had given him faith in the worship of *shakti*, the personified primordial power in whose mantra he had been initiated, and one day he had a vision while worshipping this goddess. He felt that she whom he had made his chosen deity was writing a mantra with her finger on the tip of his tongue. From this time on, whatever he asserted came true. By simply looking at a sick man he knew whether or not he would recover.

Ramkumar became well known locally for predicting future events. On seeing someone suffering from a severe disease, he would perform propitiatory rites for his recovery—declaring dramatically, 'As soon as

the grains I am sprinkling over this place of worship begin to sprout, the patient will recover.' And, in fact, what he said would come true. His nephew, Shivaram, gave us an interesting example of this. One morning, while in Calcutta on business, Ramkumar was bathing in the Ganges when a rich family also came for a bath. The wife was seated in a palanquin which was taken to the river to allow her to bathe while staying inside. Ramkumar had always lived in a small village and had never seen a woman bathe in this way, protecting herself from the public gaze. He looked at the palanquin in wonder, and happened to catch a glimpse of the woman's face. Instantly, he knew that she would die the next day. He was so overcome by the thought that he muttered sadly to himself, 'Alas! This body which is being bathed with such meticulous privacy today will tomorrow be dipped in the same water as a corpse in plain view of all!' The woman's husband overheard this unpleasant remark, and decided to teach Ramkumar a lesson, daring him to come home with him to await the outcome of his failed prophecy (the man's wife was in perfect health and there was no reason to think her death was imminent). But unfortunately Ramkumar's words came true the next day, and the bereaved man sadly sent him on his way. Once, looking into his own wife's future, Ramkumar made another prediction just as sad and just as true. He looked at her one day and predicted that she would die if ever she had a child. When she didn't conceive for several years, it was assumed that she was unable to do so. But much later, at the age of 35, she became pregnant. In the following year, 1849, she passed away after giving birth to a very beautiful boy named Akshay.

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In 1835 Kshudiram was 60 years old. Once again feeling a strong urge to go on pilgrimage, he decided to go to Gaya to

perform the traditional Hindu rites designed to satisfy the spirits of one's forefathers. Despite his advanced age, he went on foot to this holy dwelling of Vishnu. (A slightly different version of how he happened to go to Gaya is offered by Hriday, a nephew of his with whom the reader will become acquainted in due time. Also in due time, the reader will no doubt understand why we can't vouch for Hriday's version of the story, but here it is: Kshudiram's daughter Katyayani, at the age of 25, became ill. She was said to be possessed by a ghost. After Kshudiram had politely asked it to stop tormenting her, the spirit—in Katyayani's voice—agreed to his request on condition that Kshudiram would offer a worship on its behalf at Gaya.)

During this pilgrimage, Kshudiram had a dream. In the dream he entered a temple where his ancestors, in bodies of light, blessed him. As he bowed down to them, the temple was filled with divine light and all began to worship a divine Being who motioned Kshudiram closer. Hardly know-

ing what he was doing, Kshudiram worshipped the Being, who said, 'I shall be born as your son so you can take care of me.' It was a dream, but Kshudiram's joy was real. And a real doubt came to him, as well: How could he, a poor man, give proper food and shelter to such an exalted Being? But the god insisted. Kshudiram was overcome; he fainted, and the dream ended.

Kshudiram was struck by how real the dream felt. Gradually regaining consciousness of the outside world, he arose from his bed remembering details from the dream, quite convinced that some great soul would be born into his family—that at his advanced age he would once again look upon the face of a new child. He decided not to speak of it to anyone until it had come true. In a few days he bid farewell to Gaya, home of Vishnu, and returned to Kamarpukur in April of 1835.

(to be continued)

Ramakrishna Phenomenon

(Continued from page 448)

The Vedanta of the forest and the mountain-cave is to be brought to bear on our daily life. That is why a new order of monks has come into existence. For parallels we have to go back to the Buddhist age of India and the history of Medieval Europe. The immense benefit conferred on man by Buddha's *bhikkhus* and the Catholic monks is known to every student of the world's civilization. That philanthropy which is not based on renunciation inspired by spirituality but on the profit-and-loss philosophy of the utilitarian school is philanthropy without sense.... Even the word 'pity' has not been used by the founder

of the Mission. His motto is Renunciation and Service—the service of Narayana in man. It is an ideal not to be found in Buddhist India for the Buddhist ethics does not rise higher than the ethics of pity. Nor is it to be found in Medieval Europe for the Christianity of the Church never rose above dualism proper. The home of this ideal is India no doubt. The source of this ideal is India's Upanishads. But the ideal was never applied to life as it should have been. It is the large-hearted Swami who has done this for the first time in the history of Hindusthan or for that matter, in the history of the world.¹⁸

18. *Prabuddha Bharata*, 1927, p. 77.

Faith and Strength-I

Swami Vivekananda

He is an atheist who does not believe in himself. The old religion said that he was an atheist who did not believe in God. The new religion says that he is the atheist who does not believe in himself.

The history of the world is the history of a few men who had faith in themselves. That faith calls out the divinity within. You can do anything. You fail only when you do not strive sufficiently to manifest infinite power. As soon as a man or a nation loses faith, death comes.

Faith, faith, faith in ourselves, faith, faith in God—this is the secret of greatness. If you have faith in all the three hundred and thirty millions of your mythological gods, and in all the gods which foreigners have now and again introduced into your midst, and still have no faith in yourselves, there is no salvation for you.

Never think there is anything impossible for the soul. It is the greatest heresy to think so. If there is sin, this is the only sin—to say that you are weak, or others are weak.

Whatever you think, that you will be. If you think yourselves weak, weak you will be; if you think yourselves strong, strong you will be; if you think yourselves impure, impure you will be; if you think yourselves pure, pure you will be. This teaches us not to think ourselves as weak, but as strong, omnipotent, omniscient. No matter that I have not expressed it yet, it is in me. All knowledge is in me, all power, all purity, and all freedom.

Be free; hope for nothing from anyone. I am sure if you look back upon your lives you will find that you were always vainly trying to get help from others which never came. All the help that has come was from within yourselves.

Never say, 'No', never say, 'I cannot', for you are infinite. Even time and space are as nothing compared with your nature. You can do anything and everything, you are almighty.

Ye are the Children of God, the sharers of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings. Ye divinities on earth—sinners! It is a sin to call a man so; it is a standing libel on human nature. Come up, O lions, and shake off the delusion that you are sheep; you are souls immortal, spirits free, blest and eternal.

Never mind failures; they are quite natural, they are the beauty of life, these failures. What would life be without them? It would not be

worth having if it were not for struggles. Where would be the poetry of life? Never mind the struggles, the mistakes. I never heard a cow tell a lie, but it is only a cow—never a man. So never mind these failures, these little backslidings; hold the ideal a thousand times, and if you fail a thousand times, make the attempt once more.

The remedy for weakness is not brooding over weakness, but thinking of strength. Teach men of the strength that is already within them.

If there is one word that you find coming out like a bomb from the Upanishads, bursting like a bomb-shell upon masses of ignorance, it is the word fearlessness. And the only religion that ought to be taught is the religion of *fearlessness*.

If you look, you will find that I have never quoted anything but the Upanishads. And of the Upanishads, it is only that One idea, strength. The quintessence of the Vedas and Vedanta and all lies in that one word.

Be strong, my young friends; that is my advice to you. You will be nearer to Heaven through football than through the study of the Gita. These are bold words; but I have to say them, for I love you. I know where the shoe pinches. I have gained a little experience. You will understand the Gita better with your biceps, your muscles, a little stronger. You will understand the mighty genius and the mighty strength of Krishna better with a little of strong blood in you. You will understand the Upanishads better and the glory of the Atman when your body stands firm upon your feet, and you feel yourselves as men.

This is the one question I put to every man, woman, or child, when they are in physical, mental, or spiritual training. Are you strong? Do you feel strength?—for I know it is truth alone that gives strength. I know that truth alone gives life, and nothing but going towards reality will make us strong, and none will reach truth until he is strong. Every system, therefore, which weakens the mind, makes one superstitious, makes one mope, makes one desire all sorts of wild impossibilities, mysteries, and superstitions, I do not like, because its effect is dangerous. Such systems never bring any good; such things create morbidity in the mind, make it weak, so weak that in course of time it will be almost impossible to receive truth or live up to it. Strength, therefore, is the one thing needful. Strength is the medicine for the world's disease.

This is the great fact: strength is life, weakness is death. Strength is felicity, life eternal, immortal; weakness is constant strain and misery: weakness is death.

The Relevance and the Ideal of Inter-Religious Understanding in the Contemporary World in the Light of *Nahjul Balagha*

SWAMI BRAHMASTHANANDA

Swami Brahmasthananda, President of the Ramakrishna Math, Nagpur, quotes extensively from Nahjul Balagha, a book containing selections of sermons, letters and sayings of Hazrat Imam Ali, and selections from other Islamic texts, showing the underlying unity between the ideas found therein and those of the Upanishads and other Hindu, Buddhist and Christian scriptures.

This paper, edited for Prabuddha Bharata, was read at the International Congress on Nahjul Balagha in New Delhi on 18 April 1995.

Nahjul Balagha is the book of wisdom, the works of Momineen Ali Bin Abi Talib (A.S.), popularly known as Hazrat Imam Ali. Hazrat Imam Ali's charisma, arising from his personal chivalry and charm, is undisputed. The Prophet Mohammed said, 'I am the city of knowledge and Ali is its gate.' This revelation of the Prophet has deep meaning and significance. If Prophet Mohammed is the repository of knowledge, Imam Ali is the commentary. From time immemorial we find such seers who have enlightened humankind by their wisdom and taken it Godward. They are the lighthouses in the ocean of worldly existence who enlighten and inspire humanity with perennial wisdom. This wisdom is their revelation, the eternal laws governing the universe, including our world, discovered by different sages at different times. In the holy Vedas the seer proclaimed, '*Ekam sat, viprāṇi bahudhā vadanti*, Truth is one, but the sages call it by different names.' This is the basis on which we shall find the common ground for inter-religious understanding.

God of Islam and Vedanta

Imam Ali says,

Praise be to Allah, Creator of the people. He has spread the earth. He makes streams flow and grows vegetation on

high lands. His firstness has no beginning, nor has His eternity an end. He is the first and forever. He is the everlasting without limit. Foreheads bow before Him and lips declare His Oneness. He determined limits of things at the time of His creating them, keeping Himself away from their likeness. Imagination cannot determine Him with limits of movement, limbs or senses. It cannot be said about Him as to 'whence', and no time limit can be attributed to Him by saying 'till'. He is apparent but it cannot be said 'from what'. He is hidden, but it cannot be said 'in what'. He is not a body which would die, nor is He veiled so as to be contained therein. He is not near things by way of touching, nor is He remote from them by way of separation.¹

This is an excellent sermon of Imam Ali on God, the Controller of the Universe. In the *Īśa Upaniṣad*, we find verses which similarly describe the nature of Brahman:

Tadejati tannaijati

taddūre tadvantike;

Tadantarasya sarvasya tadu

sarvasyāsyā bāhyataḥ.

1. *Nahjul Balagha of Imam Ali* (Qum, Iran: Ansarian Publication, 1981), Sermon 161, p. 269.

*It moves; and It moves not. It is far and It is verily near. It is inside all this; It is outside all this.*²

The same Upanisad says again:

*Sa paryagācchukramakāyamavṛṇa-
masnāviraṁ śuddhamapāpaviddham;
Kavirmanīṣi paribhūḥ svayambhū-
ryāthātathyato'rthān
vyadadhācchāśvatibhyaḥ samābhyah.*

*He, the self-existing One, is everywhere—the pure One, without a (subtle) body, without blemish, without muscles (a gross body), holy and without taint of sin, the all-seeing, all-knowing, all-encompassing One is He. He has duly assigned their respective duties to the eternal Prajāpatis (cosmic powers).*³

Thus God in the Hindu scriptures is both transcendent and immanent. Speech and mind can never reach there because these are the creation of the Creator: '*Yato vāco nivartante, aprāpya manasā saha...*, Whence the speech falls back baffled with the mind...'⁴—such is the nature of God extolled in the Vedas and the Upaniṣads. The one eternal Substance is always behind all, and that has become manifest in the world as the subject and the object, the Perceiver and the perceived. Hence it can never be fully comprehended by the mind. The ancient seers of the Vedas never considered the different stages of consciousness as separate parts but as a continuous whole. '*Sarvam khalvidam brahma, neha nānāsti kiñcana*, All this is Brahman. There is no many at all.'⁵ The absolute Reality is One-without-a-second.

2. *Īśa Upaniṣad*, 5.

3. *Ibid.*, 8.

4. *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, II.4.1.

5. *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, III.14.1; *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, II.1.11.

The Holy Quran says, 'Verily we are God's and verily unto Him shall we return.'⁶ We find similar *mantras* in the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*:

*Ānando brahmeti vyajānāt.
Ānandāddhyeva khalvimāni bhūtāni
jāyante. Ānandena jātāni jīvanti. Ānandam
prayanatyabhisamviśantīti.*

*Know Brahman to be Bliss. Verily out of Bliss has this universe evolved, and being evolved, it lives in Bliss, and into Bliss does it go back and is absorbed.*⁷

This is one of the most sublime doctrines of the Vedanta. Brahman is the homogeneous One. It follows from this that the knowledge and happiness that we find within ourselves are the conditioned manifestations of the infinite Knowledge and Bliss. Since they are coming to us through time, space and causation, we can see but little of that infinite Knowledge and get only a partial and often a distorted view of it. Yet, the Vedic sages emphatically proclaim that the essence of Existence can be realized by man when he transcends the limits of time, space and causation. So long as he is under these limitations imposed on him by nature, however, he cannot have a full view of it, but gets a fragmentary glimpse; this partial vision of the Absolute is what he understands to be God. This is illustrated by the following example.

We see the sun in the sky. Science tells us that it is million times larger than the earth, and yet we see the sun there as only a bright little disc. Do we see the real sun or not? The answer of course is that we see it, but we don't see it fully. We see the real sun, but not as it really is, in shape, size and nature. If we are moving in a rocket towards the sun, as we go nearer and nearer, our

6. 2:156.

7. III.6.1.

vision of the sun changes; we see it larger and brighter. The light and the heat go on increasing as we go nearer to it. The sun, however, is a huge, luminous and blazing star. Therefore, what we see from the earth is both true and not wholly true. It is not the full view of the sun but a partial view. So is the case with our idea of God.

In whatever physical or mental plane a man might be, he never entirely loses awareness of his inner Self, the Witness within, with whose consciousness he lives, moves and has his being. Just as we are aware of the existence of the real sun all the time, so we have an intuitive feeling of the existence of that eternal, unchangeable ocean of Knowledge and Bliss within us, however much the vision may be dimmed and distorted by our surroundings. As we try to approach God through the practice of holiness and purity, we evolve higher and higher in our consciousness of the Spirit. Our ideas of God, too, develop and become clearer; thus it is that the various ideas of God have come to us in this world. All these various ideas of God are not false, they represent but stages in the process of evolution and growth.

The concept of the Personal God (*Īśvara*) in Vedānta is that He is immanent in nature, and creation is a partial manifestation of Him. His body is this wonderful universe and His mind is the cosmic Mind. He is the sum total of all sentient and insentient things; He is working through all physical and mental forces, and yet He transcends all.

In the *Holy Quran*, Prophet Mohammed spoke of Allah in many places. In Surah 30, verse 40, he reveals the power of God, His creation, and even the doctrine of re-birth! 'Allah is He who created you and then sustained you, then causeth you to die, then giveth life to you again....Praised and exalted be He above what they associate [with

Him].' Man has been given the supreme position among all creatures in the creation. This is recorded in all the religious scriptures of the world.

Transient Nature of the World

All religions emphasize that the nature of the world is transient. Hazrat Ali says,

I warn you of the world for it is the abode of the unsteady. It is not a house for foraging. It has decorated itself with deception and deceives with its decoration. It is a house which is low before Allah. So He has mixed its lawful with its unlawful, its good with its evil, its life with its death and its sweetness with its bitterness. Ask from Him (Allah) fulfilment of what He has asked you to do. Make your ears hear the call of death before you are called by death.⁸

This is the reality of this world—very tempting but ultimately bringing mostly suffering and misery. Hazrat Ali rightly cautions us through this sermon. In the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, Sri Krishna says, '...*Anityamasukham lokam-imaṃ prāpya bhajasva mām*, Having obtained this transient, joyless world, worship Me, the Lord.'⁹ Having been born in this human body, which is hard to get, one should exert oneself for perfection as every thing in this world is transient. In this ever-changing world, we cannot get happiness unless we surrender to God alone.

In his sermon 197, Hazrat Ali again says,

O, creatures of Allah, I advise you to keep away from this world which is (shortly) to leave you even though you do not like its departure, and which makes your bodies old even though you

8. *Nahijul Balagha*, Sermon 111.

9. 9.33.

would like to keep them fresh....Do you not see that your predecessors do not come back and the surviving followers do not remain? Do you not observe that people of the world pass mornings and evenings in different conditions?¹⁰

This sermon is in accordance with the central teaching of the Prophet Mohammed, that men shall witness the existence and unity of God and shall fear and serve God because the world is unreal. He instructs humankind to tread the path of purity and righteousness to prepare oneself for the joy of spiritual transcendence and that, to achieve communion with the Almighty, one should detach oneself from worldly desires. By practising spiritual discipline, man manifests the divine in him. Jesus said, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' This is the essence in all the scriptures of the world, and the essence of all true religions.

The Purpose of Life is to Manifest Divinity

Swami Vivekananda, who was a revolutionary teacher of religion says:

Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity within by controlling nature external and internal. Do this either by work or by worship, or psychic control, or philosophy—by one or more, or all of these, and be free. This is the whole of religion. Doctrines or dogmas, or rituals or books or temples or forms are but secondary details.¹¹

Therefore we should have this conviction that the purpose of our life is to manifest divinity through practising righteousness in every thing we do.

God is the infinite divine Power. Just as

the sun and its rays are in essence one, the essence of all beings and the essence of God are one and the same. The differences we see in the world are in the degree of manifestation of His power (*Śakti*). The Creator transcends all the units of time, space and causation which bind the limited mind of man. Man can attain to the state of God-consciousness as soon as he feels himself one with Him. This is the grace of God. This has been demonstrated again and again in the lives of the great Teachers in all the different religions. This feeling of mystic Oneness, or communion with Him, is one of the greatest teachings of all prophets.

Swami Vivekananda emphasizes that that feeling of oneness with God is an important aspect in the path to God. He exhorts us saying,

Do you not know from the history of the world where the power of the prophets lay? Where was it? In the intellect? Did any of them write a fine book on philosophy, on the most intricate ratiocinations of logic? Not one of them. They only spoke a few words. Feel like Christ and you will be a Christ; feel like Buddha and you will be a Buddha. It is feeling that is the life, the strength, the vitality, without which no amount of intellectual activity can reach God.¹²

On analysis we find that all religious teachers led God-centred, pure and perfect lives. Wisdom pours forth in their words and they provide humankind with faith in the hour of doubts, inspire hope and instil confidence in times of crisis. Their only mission on earth is to dispel the ignorance of people, not only by preaching and precepts but by the example of their lives. Example is better than precept. Sri Krishna saved the people of Gokul from many dangers. He

10. *Nahjul Balagha*

11. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), vol. 1, p. 257.

12. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 307.

washed the feet of Brahmins and sages during the *Rājasūya Yajña*. Buddha was ready to sacrifice his life to save the life of a lamb. King Rantideva gave away everything to the famine-stricken people of his kingdom and himself died of starvation. Jesus Christ sacrificed his life for Truth and righteousness. Prophet Mohammed's life was a continuous struggle for the cause of Islam, and Hazrat Ali showed in his life an exemplary courage, forgiveness and compassion.

When Hazrat Ali was stabbed while he was praying, his followers brought his murderer before him with hands tied behind his back and bonds cutting into his flesh. Hazrat Ali was so merciful that he ordered his followers to untie the hands of the man and treat him more humanely. In his will to his elder son, Imam Hasan, he advised him to prefer forgiveness to retaliation, for God keeps friendship with forgiveness and those who practise patience. This was his last advice before his death. When his son, Imam Hasan was returning home with his companions after the burial of Hazrat Ali, they heard a cry in the distance. When they reached that place they saw a leper crying and asking Imam Hasan why he had not come for the last three days. The leper mistook Imam Hasan for Hazrat Ali, for the voice of Imam Hasan was very similar to that of his father. Imam Hasan replied, 'The person who used to come has passed away.' The leper said, 'He used to clean my hands and feet, and used to provide fruits for me daily and used to put pillows beneath my head.' This was the rare spiritual quality of Hazrat Ali who showed real Karma-Yoga in his life. He never exhibited his compassion for gaining name or fame, but he showed compassion in the name of Allah, the Merciful.

Building of Character

In his teachings Hazrat Ali emphasized kindness and *insaniyat* (gentlemanly behav-

iour). He said,

You must create in your mind kindness and love for your subjects. Do not behave with them as if you were a voracious and ravenous beast and your success lay in tearing up and devouring them.

Muslims and non-Muslims should be treated alike. Muslims are your brothers and non-Muslims are human beings just like you.¹³

From the stories and teachings and examples in the lives of the great religious leaders, we get inspiration. Let us always remember the emphatic utterance of Swami Vivekananda:

...holiness, purity and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world, and...every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character. In the face of this evidence, if anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of the others, I pity him from the bottom of my heart, and point out to him that upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of resistance: 'Help and not Fight,' 'Assimilation and not Destruction,' 'Harmony and Peace and not Dissension.'¹⁴

Let these be our mottos for the new world culture.

Need for Inter-Religious Understanding

All religions are the outcome of divine revelations to the messengers, prophets, incarnations and sages. These holy ones never taught people to fight in the name of religion. The world has been changing rapidly

13. *Nahjul Balagha*.

14. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 1, p. 24.

and the contemporary world seeks a modern solution to the old problems. It also seeks the meaning of life and life's goal. A living society has always to adjust itself to circumstances if it is to progress. Progress may be called our 'watchword' in modern times. But we must remember the words of Swami Vivekananda:

*Truth does not pay homage to any society, ancient or modern. Society has to pay homage to Truth or die. Societies should be moulded upon truth, and truth has not to adjust itself to society....That society is the greatest, where the highest truths become practical.*¹⁵

Therefore, in this modern world, let us come together and readjust society upon truth, upon the spiritual forces working within us. Religion is based on faith, and science is based on reason. We should develop a new society with the combination of faith and reason. The great scientist Albert Einstein said pertinently, 'Science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind.'

Religions seek the ways by which man can come closer to God. Science seeks through reason the means to make life happier in this world. Reason can also lead us a long way in our pursuits of life's goals, but it cannot give us realization of the Divine

15. Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 84-5.

Being or the Divine Reality: '*Naiṣā tarkaṇa matriāpaneyā...*, 'Not with reason and argumentation can the intuitive wisdom be achieved!'¹⁶ Our organs of perception do not give us the true picture of reality, but the intuitive wisdom derived from prayer and communion with God does not deceive us. So Nahjul Balagha said: 'Perception with the eyes is not real observation, because eyes sometimes deceive...but wisdom does not deceive whomever it counsels.'¹⁷

Religion is a great cohesive force at work in the world, there is no doubt about it. The truly religious approach to the question of the purpose and goal of life has never been without sincere seekers who are our religious leaders. May they, by their compassion, lead us to understand the basic unity in all the religions and help us to express this in service-oriented activities for the total development of humanity. Spiritual strength may then flow into all our worldly actions.

Hazrat Ali said: 'Fortunate is he who takes lessons from others, while unfortunate is he who falls victim to his desire.'¹⁸ Let us fulfil his commandment for 'the Ideal of Inter-Religious Understanding' in this modern world. □

16. *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, 1.2.9.

17. *Nahjul Balagha*.

18. Ibid.

'In the winter sometimes a thunder-cloud comes up; it roars and roars, but it does not rain; but in the rainy season the clouds speak not, but deluge the world with water.' So those who are *really* workers, and *really* feel at heart the universal brotherhood of man, do not talk much, do not make little sects for universal brotherhood; but their acts, their movements, their whole life, show out clearly that they in truth possess the feeling of brotherhood for mankind, that they have love and sympathy for all. They do not speak, they *do* and they *live*. This world is too full of blustering talk. We want a little more earnest work, and less talk

—*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 2, p. 380.

Centenary Celebrations of Swami Vivekananda's Return to India

The **Ramakrishna Mission at Chengalpattu** organized competitions in elocution, essay-writing, recitation, sayings of Swamiji, music, devotional songs, drawing, drama, etc. from the 17th to the 24th November, 1996, in which nearly 1090 students from various schools and colleges participated. The students and teachers of the Ashrama's school visited several nearby villages from the 25th to the 29th January and spoke on Swamiji's message. On the 5th February, a massive procession of about 10,000 students and many other local persons was conducted. Next morning, a function was held at the Chengalpattu railway station. The station was decorated tastefully and a number of devotees attended the programme. Besides, some programmes on Swamiji organized by the centre were telecast on T.V. by Doordarshan.

The **Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama at Allahabad** organized a symposium on 'The Relevance

of Swami Vivekananda in the Present National Context' on the 26th January. Eminent speakers addressed the gathering. A youth convention was held on the 2nd February in which 165 youths took part.

The **Ramakrishna Mission at Delhi** organized a programme on Swamiji's Triumphant Return to India in Doordarshan which was telecast on the 26th January on the National Network.

The **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama at Chennai** held competitions in recitation, elocution and quiz in Tamil, English and Telugu from the 6th to the 10th January in which 769 students from 64 schools participated. A public meeting held on the 8th February was attended by a large gathering.

The **Ramakrishna Math at Madurai** conducted competitions in recitation and speech in which 140 students from various schools and colleges participated. An impressive procession of about 4000 students and devotees, and a public meeting were organized on the 1st February. □

Just as the sun, which is the eye of the whole world, is not tainted by the ocular and external defects, similarly the Self, which is but one in all beings, is not tainted by the sorrows of the world, It being transcendental.

—Kāṭha Upaniṣad, 2.2.11

Reviews and Notices

ECHOES OF VEDANTA IN THE FAR EAST: Ed. Pravrajika Ajayaprana; publ. Ramakrishna Sarada Vedanta Society, New South Wales, Australia; 1994.

Echoes of Vedanta in the Far East is a collection of twelve edited lectures and three poems. This is the first publication of the Vedanta Society of Australia, a branch of Sri Sarada Math. The book fulfils a long-pending request of Australian devotees, as the editor, Pravrajika Ajayaprana, says in her Preface. The former General Secretary of the Sarada Math, Pravrajika Muktiprana, gives in the Foreword, the history of the Sarada Order and congratulates the publishers for their work.

The first article is a talk given by Srimat Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj, President of the Ramakrishna Order. He gives a beautiful description of the life of the Holy Mother in his characteristically simple, yet charming way. In a talk on 'Divine Grace' reproduced here, Swami Ranganathanandaji says that one has to build up one's life through hard work. Manliness, strength and courage should be developed. Then alone will the attitude of self-surrender grow and through that the grace of God will descend upon the individual. The next eight lectures are by Pravrajika Ajayaprana. 'The Vision: Echoes of Its Message' outlines the various aspects of Swami Vivekananda's life and highlights some of Swamiji's great qualities. 'Sri Ramakrishna's Concept of Religion' tells us how one has to struggle in life and live the life against all odds so as to realize the Truth. This realization is religion according to Sri Ramakrishna. 'Some Luminous Tracts Left in Space' is an article about the Holy Mother's divinity and her being the guiding spirit behind the Ramakrishna Order. 'Vedanta and Bhakti Yoga' is a discussion about how Vedanta has all the other paths included in it. 'The Perfect Way' deals with three subjects that have top priority in society: science, religion and democracy.

Various examples are cited to show that religion is the supreme way to peace and happiness. The lecture on Rabia is a collection of incidents from her inspiring life. 'Consciousness and Vibrations' is a detailed explanation of the religious, spiritual and scientific views about consciousness and the effects of vibrations. All that is needed, feels the writer, is to go deeper within so as to reach the state of illumined consciousness. 'Human Will and Divine Will' discusses at length the so-called controversy between the two wills. When and where does the human will end and the Divine begin to function is a debated question. The human will is only a reflection of the divine will and when the 'Divine Eye' is opened, human will smoothly merges into the divine will. 'Sri Ramakrishna and Vedanta' is an address given by Yvonne Malykke. It is a documented speech about the essentials of Vedanta and the life of Sri Ramakrishna in brief. The last article is about harmony. Everywhere there is an order—be it in the plant world or the animal. The same order exists in human life also. This order or harmony has higher aspects and for achieving higher harmony, one needs to realize the Supreme within. Then, not only does one find unity with oneself, but one sees it in nature also.

There are three poems in the book. One is the story of Svetaketu, the second is about a saint who has 'felt the bliss no evil will ever dispel', and the third is an address to the Divine Mother to remove ignorance and take the soul playing the game of life unto Her lap.

The book has a detailed glossary of Sanskrit terms and a note on transliteration. There is a detailed index also.

The *Echoes of Vedanta* is thus a worthy attempt to place before the world the influence of Vedanta in Australia, giving a broad idea of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement.

Swami Sunirmalananda, Belur Math

ŚRĪ RĀMAKRṢṆA NĀMASAṆKĪRTANAM:
By Swami Harshananda; publ. Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore 560 019; 1996; pp. 40; Rs. 5/-.

In Bhakti Yoga singing the names and glories of God is prescribed as a means to the attainment of divine bliss. As a corollary to this, the *Nāmasaṅkīrtanam* (chanting of the divine names or attributes) is done all over India. *Rāmanāma Saṅkīrtanam* is the most common among several Saṅkīrtanams like 'Śivanāma' and 'Śyāmanāma'.

Around 1965, a *Nāmasaṅkīrtanam* on Sri Ramakrishna in Devanagari was composed. Immensely popular, especially among the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, this 'text-only' form, though quite simple in its composition, has been wanting a suitable translation for a clearer understanding of its full import. Now Swami Harshananda has brought out this booklet containing the text in Devanagari with transliteration in Roman script with English rendering. It will highly benefit any devotee who recites the *Nāmasaṅkīrtanam* as the efficacy of the chanting is helpful to meditation if done with a mind absorbed in the meaning and endowed with conceptual understanding of the words chanted.

B.

SWAMI VIJNANANANDA AND HIS PARAMAHAMSA CARITA: By Arun Kumar Biswas; publ. Sujan Publications, C/o Sales Alliance, 7-B Lake Place, Calcutta 700 029; 1994; pp. 152; Rs. 150/-.

Swami Vijnanananda (1868–1938), a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna wrote a biography of the Master in Hindi named *Paramahansa Carita* which was published in 1904. Apart from being the first biography of Sri Ramakrishna by any of his Sannyasi disciples, it is the only original book in Hindi on Sri Ramakrishna by one who had seen him.

The present English translation of *Paramahansa Carita* has two parts. In Part I, the first chapter gives a short biography of

Swami Vijnanananda. The second chapter contains the reminiscences of Sri Ramakrishna by Swami Vijnanananda. Culled from various sources, these reminiscences find a place in this volume, according to the translator, because they give a closer view of the personality of Sri Ramakrishna as against the portrayal of him in an impersonal way in the biography in Part II of the book. Delineation of the background and specialities of *Paramahansa Carita* are dealt with in chapter three.

The second part of the book contains a free translation of the original *Paramahansa Carita*. In his introduction, Swami Vijnanananda outlines the exigency of an incarnation of God like Sri Ramakrishna who was the epitome of 'universal wisdom, love and devotion'. Sri Ramakrishna not only preached but lived the values he taught 'which constitute the foundation of, as well as the beacon-light in, the human society without which nobody can survive'.

The biography of Sri Ramakrishna which follows is concise. The discursive depiction of the biographical sketch is too minuscule to deal in its ambit with the incidents and phases of Master's life at any length.

The next section, Upadesha (Sayings), presents by far the most informative and valuable aspect of the book. Sri Ramakrishna's sayings numbering 590 collected under 119 headings are said to be the first ever categorized presentation of the Great Master's sayings.

B.

THE PURUSHASUKTA: AN EXEGESIS: By Swami Harshananda; publ. Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore 560 019; 1996; pp. 48; Rs. 7.50.

'The *Purushasukta* is not only an integral part of the Veda but also one of the most important expositions of its teaching', says the learned translator, Swami Harshananda, in his 'Exegesis'. Indeed, this slim volume is a marvel of suggestive exposition of the main tenets of the philosophy of *Purushasukta* along with a lucidly translated English version.

The Swami sees the Hymn (recitation of which is very common in many Hindu rituals) as a succinct compendium of the main tenets of Hindu philosophy. 'It gives us', he says, 'in a capsule form, the philosophy not only of the Vedas and the Vedanta, but also of the *Bhagavadgita*, giving equal importance to upasana (meditation), jnana (knowledge), bhakti (devotion) and dharma or karma (rituals and performance of one's duties).'

These aspects are analysed with full awareness of modern trends in the *Exegesis* and the Swami's comments on some of the implications are instinct with an originality of interpretation rarely to be found in expositions of traditional texts. I was particularly struck by his extremely balanced and highly original interpretation of the Varna system and the *Purushasukta*. Thus the entire exegetis is an original contribution contemporising the implications of what is certainly a crucial text of Hinduism.

The text with translation (and transliteration) prepared by the erudite Swami is an invaluable addition to the quantum of source books. The Swami is a prolific writer and translator with several books to his credit (notably, his rendering of *Sandilya Bhakti Sutras* remains indispensable) and in *Purushasukta* edition he has given us a very valuable text. A classic, in short, gets in the present form, the stature of an indispensable source book.

Prof. M. Sivaranikrishna
Hyderabad

PRITHVI-PARIKRAMA (Hindi): By
Krishnanath Publishers; publ. Apala
Prakashan Sahakar Samiti Ltd.,
Lucknow-7; pp. 195; Rs. 75/-.

Prof. Krishnanath, the author of this travelogue, teaches Social Sciences at Benares Hindu University. His spiritual quest, early in his life, led him to the study and practice of Buddhism. His extensive and in-depth knowledge of that religion illuminates every page of this book. The author was invited in 1981 by the International Association of Buddhist Studies in

U.S.A. to participate in the conference on Buddhism. It was held at Wisconsin University to gain first hand knowledge about the research and publication works that were going on in the field of Buddhism. Wherever he went he visited museums and research centres and held discussions with the Buddhist scholars. His sojourn covered Italy, Germany, France, England, Japan, Hong Kong and Thailand. He kept a diary in which he noted down all his observations about different countries, peoples and their unique cultural traits.

Prof. Krishnanath's keen observations and musings are not simply passing remarks of a hurrying traveller but are perceptive and serious. In Western countries he noticed the worship of the physical body and its beauty. To these people, he comments, the body is the ultimate truth, beyond it nothing else exists. The Western affluence and break-neck speed brought before his eyes the abject poverty and inertia of Indian people. He noticed that if the West moved to one extreme, India moved to another extreme. This led him to realize that self-control is the greatest virtue. In the absence of self-restraint, be it in India or elsewhere, everything goes out of control.

An interesting and thoughtful book for all our Hindu readers.

Swami Muktirupananda
Ootacamund

My whole ambition in life is to set in motion a machinery which will bring noble ideas to the door of everybody, and then let men and women settle their own fate. Let them know what our forefathers as well as other nations have thought on the most momentous questions of life. Let them see specially what others are doing now, and then decide. We are to put the chemicals together, the crystallisation will be done by nature according to her laws.

—The Complete Works of
Swami Vivekananda, vol. 5, p. 29

Human Excellence

Generosity

In Karnataka there once lived a saintly person, Basheshwar, with his wife Gangabika. One night, while they were asleep, a thief broke in and snatched away a precious necklace worn by Gangabika. She was roused from her sleep, and discovering her loss, raised a hue and cry.

Hearing his wife's scream, Basheshwar awoke and understanding everything, instead of becoming worried or anxious, severely reprimanded his wife with the words, 'How selfish and smitten with greed can you be! Instead of screaming and shouting and waking up the entire neighbourhood, you should have offered the intruder the rest of your ornaments as well.' Hearing his stern admonition, Gangabika became quiet and asked pardon of her husband. Continuing in the same vein, Basheshwar spoke, 'The thief was none other than Sangamath. Most probably he was in need of something and so came here with great expectation. Anyhow, your necklace should see him through the next few days of hardship.'

Meanwhile, the thief who was indeed Sangamath, had not fled but hidden himself in one corner of the room. Hearing the words of Basheshwar was like nectar to his ears. That very instant he realized his mistake in robbing a very holy man with a noble heart. He therefore came out of his hiding and fell at the feet of Basheshwar seeking his forgiveness and returning to him his stolen necklace. He further vowed that he would never steal again. 'Please take it back,' said Basheshwar, returning the necklace, continuing, 'always remember that whenever you are in need, please come to me without any hesitation.'

What a transformation did the saintly behaviour of Basheshwar bring about in Sangamath!